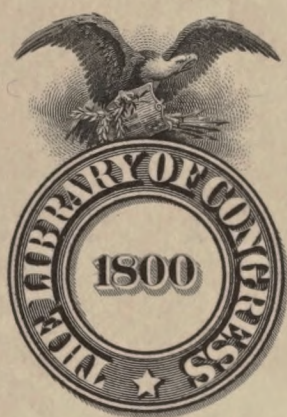


THE AIRSHIP BOYS ADRIFT

or Saved by an Aeroplane

H.L.SAYLER





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The Airship Boys Series

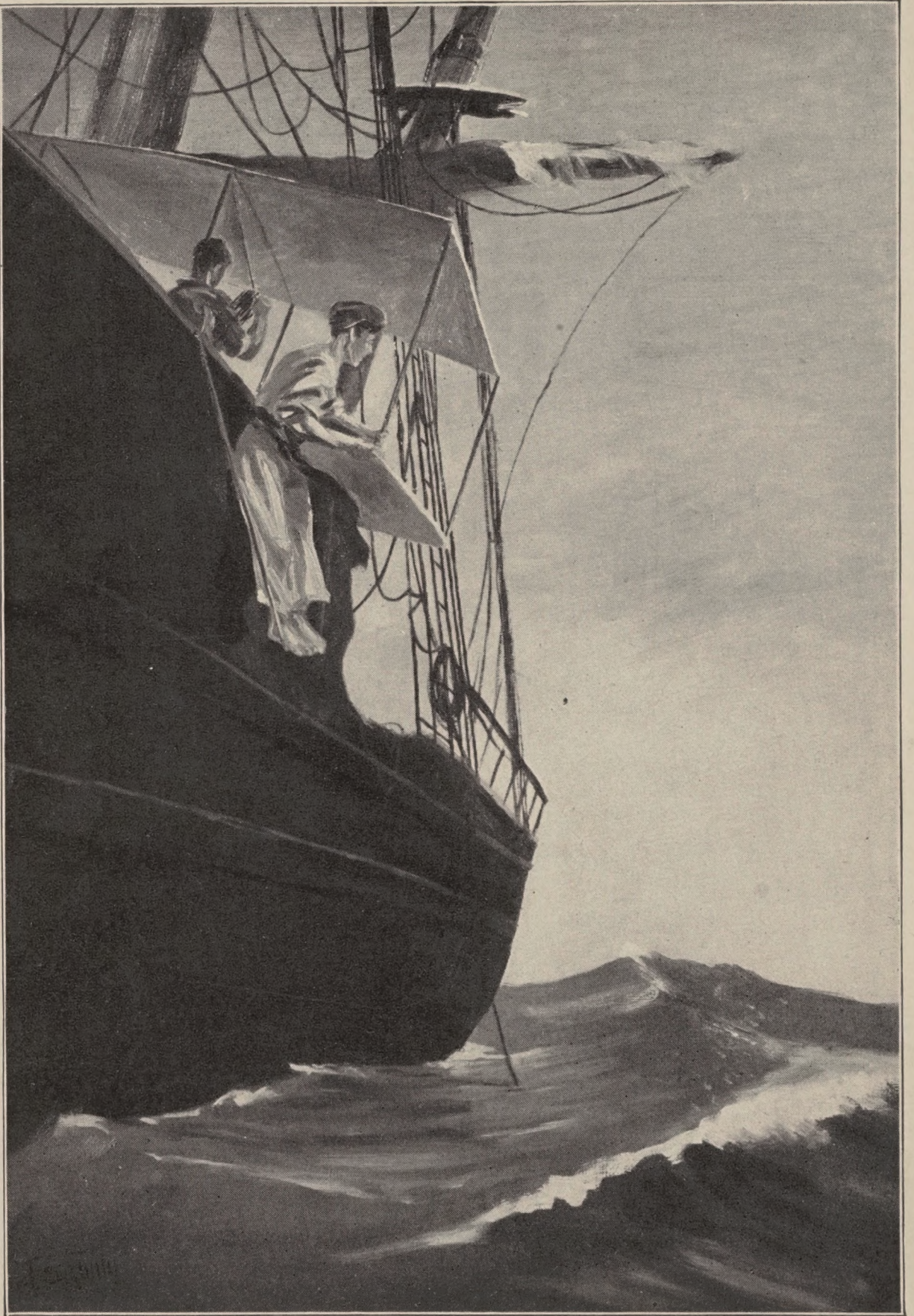
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CONSTRUCTING THE AEROPLANE. (*Page 214.*)

The Airship Boys Adrift

or, Saved by an Aeroplane

BY
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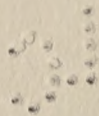
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The Airship Boys Adrift

OR,

Saved by an Aeroplane

CHAPTER I

BOB RUSSELL LOSES ONE JOB AND FINDS ANOTHER

When Bob Russell, the youngest reporter on the *Kansas City Comet*, reported for work at half past seven o'clock on a sunny morning in mid-September, he found two messages awaiting him.

One was a note curtly ordering him to report to his Managing Editor at once. The other was a telegram asking whether he could come to Chicago to discuss a business matter of importance with his boy friend Ned Napier.

He responded immediately to the command of his superior. That gentleman, his eye-glasses low on his nose and an unlit cigar set in his mouth, received Bob brusquely, without even a "good morning."

"Russell," said the Editor quickly, "I told you two weeks ago that I would think over your case. Have you changed your mind?"

"No," answered Bob. "I'm sorry, but I haven't."

The Editor whirled his chair, looked out of the window, then turned and seemed to relent a little.

"I'm sorry, too," he went on. "You are the youngest man who ever worked under me. I thought you had possibilities. Your attitude disappoints me. What's worse, you are defiant. I don't blame you so much for failing to get the real story, but I can't understand why you won't write what you *do* know."

"Because circumstances were such that I had to give my word that I would not."

"But you realize that you are working for the *Comet*. We paid your expenses. What do we get for the money we spent on your trip?"

"I'm ready to repay what was advanced, every cent of it—\$112.50."

The Editor shook his head.

"Won't you tell me why you had to give your word that you would write nothing?"

"Gladly," answered Bob. "I offered to tell you before, but—"

"Go ahead," said the Editor, ignoring the mild

rebuke and spinning his chair around again.

"Six weeks ago," began Bob, "on August first, I discovered and we printed the story of a mysterious special car that passed through Kansas City that day on its way west—"

"Yes," interrupted the nervous Editor, biting at his cigar, "and it was a bit of work an older man might have been proud of."

"Thank you," said Bob. "In that story we told for the first time that two boys, Ned Napier, a young aeronaut, and his friend Alan Hope, together with Elmer Grissom, a young colored servant, all from Chicago, were on their way to Clarkeville, New Mexico, with a carload of balloon apparatus. They refused to say what their plans were, but I made a guess. In my story I said that they represented the Hydrographic Office in Washington and were engaged in a big experiment."

"And you were not right?" interrupted the Editor, relaxing into a faint smile.

"I was not."

"And you can't say even now what they were going to do?"

"I cannot."

"Don't you know?" exclaimed the man, wheeling sharply, with renewed impatience in his tone.

"I do not."

The Editor shook his head. "And yet," he said, "you followed them and were with them from the beginning to the end. And you don't know what they were doing?"

"I know a great deal that they did. But the real object of that expedition I never learned. We had adventures, and"—as the young reporter said this his eyes glistened and his smile came back—"and they were real ones. But conditions arose that I couldn't control and I lost even the story of what I really did see."

"Personally," commented the Editor with some sarcasm, "I must confess that I can't imagine such a condition. Your sense of honor must be highly developed. Go on."

Bob was silent a moment. "After I wrote my guess at what Napier and his friend meant to do—and it wasn't even a good guess—you remember the *New York World* and the *Comet* ordered me to follow the expedition and discover its object. I started the next day. When I landed in Clarkeville I was a tramp—"

"Real detective!" interrupted the Editor, returning to his sarcasm.

"No," laughed Bob in reply, "a very bad one. Napier was too sharp for me. I hired out to him, for he was doing a lot of work building a big dirigible balloon, and he got onto me in two days."

"Then what?"

"I was ordered out of town by the marshal and he started me going at the point of a revolver. That's where I fell down. I tried to bluff it out for the *Comet* and twice I should have been shot for my pains if Napier had not jumped in and saved my life both times. There was only one way in which I could stay and that was as Napier's friend and confidant. What I found out later was because he and his friend trusted me and—well, there you are."

The Editor was thinking and puzzled. "And yet you say you stayed with this mysterious expedition and never learned its object?"

"Just that," answered Bob. "I saw the balloon put together and I rode on it into the mountain wilderness of Arizona. That was on August 12. Napier and Hope left the colored boy and me in camp on that day. I didn't see them again for eleven days. Then we all met in the mountains, on foot, all of us pretty near 'all in.' We got back to Clarkeville on August 29, and reached Kansas City four days later."

"And you don't know where they went?"

"No."

"And haven't even a theory?"

"I made one guess and it was wrong," answered Bob, laughing. "Some time I'll know,

and then, when I'm at liberty to do so, I'll be glad to write the story for the *Comet*."

The Managing Editor was silent for several minutes.

"When that time comes," he said at last with some disgust, "you can go to work again for the *Comet*."

"Then I'm discharged."

"Yes."

The Managing Editor turned angrily to his desk without even a formal "good day."

Bob hesitated a moment and then, with a cheery "good morning," left the office.

A half-hour later a boy laid on the desk of the Managing Editor a check for \$112.50, payable to the *Comet* and signed by Robert Russell. With it was a note. "Refund of expense money paid to me on Clarkeville balloon story."

That night the young reporter, full of his old-time cheerful enthusiasm and vigor, was a passenger on the fast train to Chicago. At ten o'clock the next morning Bob reached the attractive suburb where Ned Napier and his mother lived. He had never seen Ned's home, but he could not fail to identify it when his quick eye caught sight of a building in the back yard, half workshop and half library. Not stopping to present himself at the front door, he walked briskly

around the house. A moment later he and Ned Napier and Alan Hope were shaking hands and, boy fashion, slapping each other's backs vigorously.

"And so this is where the celebrated *Cibola* was planned and figured out," exclaimed Bob, when he had been ushered into Ned's shop. "Well, it looks it," he added. The lathes, the electric motor, the experimental gasoline engine, the racks of tools, the shelves of models and patterns, the case of books on aviation, the drawing table, the shaded drop lights—to say nothing of the odds and ends dear to every boy—all told of an owner experienced beyond his years.

"Yes," replied Ned, "this is where the *Cibola* was born. And it's going to be the birthplace of something better than the *Cibola* before we get through. We're mighty glad you could come."

"What's the business?" laughed Bob.

"Today is Saturday," explained Alan, "and we knew it was your day off. Ned will tell you."

"We want to celebrate," explained Ned. "You were with us in our hard luck. Now we are in good luck and we want you to share it with us."

Bob laughed. "It's good luck just to see you. But what's up?"

"I'll give it to you all at once," went on Ned. "The long and short of it is that we made money

out of our trip into the mountains of New Mexico and Arizona. We made \$25,000 between us—”

Bob looked from one to the other in surprise.

“And Alan and I believe we owe our lives partly to you. We want to make you a present of a thousand dollars.”

As he said this Alan handed the astonished reporter a certificate of deposit for that amount.

Bob’s ever-present smile left him and he fell back on his chair with hardly a glance at the engraved paper. Before he could express his astonishment Alan added:

“Don’t make a fuss. You’ll make us feel glad if you’ll just take it and not even thank us. It really ought to be more.”

But this was too much for even the jovial Bob; he could not restrain his emotion. Finally he said: “I’ll do it if you think I ought.” Then, after a pause, he gave one of his characteristic little laughs. “It may come in handy. I lost my job yesterday.”

“Lost your job!” exclaimed Ned. “How?”

Confusion again swept over Bob, for he had told something that he had meant to conceal.

“I’ll bet it was on account of us!” interrupted Alan quickly.

“Well,” said Bob at last, “it really grew out of what I didn’t know about your trip.”

For a moment the three boys sat in silence. "But you said you were going to give me something better than your secret, and I guess you have," said Bob, smoothing out the thousand-dollar certificate on his knee.

"And you were discharged because you kept your promise to us?" went on Ned impetuously.

"I don't put it that way," explained Bob. "I just didn't agree with my boss. Don't blame yourselves."

"Then you're no longer a reporter!" exclaimed Ned with significance, glancing at Alan.

"Not just now," replied Bob.

Ned beckoned Alan aside, and for a few moments the two chums were in close conference. When they turned again their faces were radiant.

"Then," said Ned, slapping Bob on the shoulder, "you've got to know our secret. And more—we want you for a full partner in a new adventure. Is it a go?"

"That's up to you, boys," answered Bob a little sheepishly. "If you want to tell me I'll be glad. I should like to know where this came from," and he held up the certificate. "As for joining you in any enterprise, why—well, you can count on me as long as Ned Napier and Alan Hope lead the way."

"Good!" exclaimed Ned. "Then here's the se-

cret you came so near knowing. A year ago Major Baldwin Honeywell, once of the United States Army, but now retired, discovered, in an Indian burial vase, a record made three hundred and fifty years ago by a Spaniard named Vasquez, in which was told the secret of an Indian temple in the Tunit Cha Mountains. In this record was an account of treasures to be had in the place which was marked by a certain Turquoise Temple. A friend of Major Honeywell's, Senor Oje, a wealthy Mexican sheep-owner of Colorado, advanced the money, and Alan and I were given a commission to find the treasure. In the dirigible balloon *Cibola* we planned to discover the lost temple—"

"And you did it right under my nose," interrupted Bob, jumping to his feet in his excitement.

"Yes. We found it. But we had to leave the *Cibola* on the mesa where we made the discovery. When we had managed to find our way out of the mountains on foot and had met you we had \$75,000 worth of pearls and amethysts on our persons."

"And this is a part of that?" excitedly exclaimed Bob, fingering his gift.

"Precisely. One-third of the value of the jewels came to us. And we left not less than

\$45,000 worth of gold and silver on the mesa; perhaps more."

"And you know where this is?" almost shouted Bob.

"Listen!" went on Ned. "Three days ago Senor Oje returned from New York. We had a settlement. Major Honeywell is an ethnologist. Among the other things we found in the temple and couldn't bring away were a number of valuable Indian urns and other relics. Major Honeywell determined to possess these and is eager to see the ruins from which they came."

"Why doesn't he go to them, then?" interrupted Bob.

"He is going to," replied Ned. "We couldn't leave \$50,000 worth of metal down there. Major Honeywell is eager to see those ruins, and we've promised to take him to them. And then we're going to recover the *Cibola*!"

"The balloon?" exclaimed Bob in astonishment.

"Yes. Despite the Utes and Navajos we are going to make a flying trip into the mountains from the north, reinflate the *Cibola*, dash out of the mountains with it to civilization in Colorado and carry Major Honeywell back—he's a cripple, you know—and then clean up everything on the mesa by means of our aerial express."

Bob was on his feet again, flushed with excite-

ment. "And your gas for the balloon!" he exclaimed suddenly.

"Compressed in cylinders and carried on burro back."

The young reporter could only shake his head in admiration.

"Everything is arranged," added Alan, glancing again at Ned, "but our party. We need one more member who has sand and pluck. You are no longer a newspaper man and you are free to do as you like. If you care to join us we'll make you a full partner in our third interest. What do you say?"

"What do I say? I say this is the luckiest day of my life—that's all. I'm ready this minute."

"We leave next Tuesday evening," said Ned, grasping the new partner's hand, "and on this story you are going to be in from the start."

CHAPTER II

PREPARATIONS FOR THE MOUNTAINS

"And now," said Ned, "we have a lot to do. I want you boys to have luncheon with me. This afternoon we will go into the city and see that our outfit is ready. Tomorrow," he added, turning to Bob Russell, "you had better return to Kansas City and get ready to join us when we pass through that place Wednesday morning."

Before they took Bob in to meet Mrs. Napier the boys hastily explained to him a few things.

"The other trip cost Senor Oje \$12,580," explained Ned. "And his share of the treasure was \$25,000. He is ready to pay the entire expenses of this trip, but we are all sharing in it alike. We are going to give you a one-third interest in our one-third share."

"But," interrupted Bob. "I don't see why. I can't do the things that you boys do."

"We'll take a chance on that," laughed Ned.

"All right," responded Bob, "but since I'm a capitalist now I want you to let me share in the expenses too."

To this the boys finally consented and Bob

turned his thousand-dollar certificate back into the general treasury.

"We are going by rail direct to Dolores in southwestern Colorado," continued Ned. "This is where the home ranch of Senor Oje is located. He left for the west two days ago and will meet us with a wagon train and the men who are to help us. From Dolores we are to freight it across Montezuma Valley to the foot of Ute Mountain, which is practically at the point where Colorado, Utah, New Mexico and Arizona form right angles. There, near McElmo Canyon, we are to make a camp where Senor Oje, Major Honeywell and the main outfit will be left. From this camp Alan, you, Elmer Grissom, 'Salty Bill' Donnelly and I are going to set out to rediscover the treasure mesa."

"And then—?"

"The *Cibola* is to be inflated. With the aid of the balloon we will return to the camp and get Major Honeywell. By making enough trips we hope to carry all back to the camp at McElmo Canyon—and the treasure and Indian relics."

"But how about this compressed hydrogen?" asked Bob, with a puzzled look.

"Since we can't take liquid hydrogen this time," answered Ned, "we are going to carry pure hydrogen highly compressed. We need at least

65,000 cubic feet, and a dozen ordinary compressed air drums will hold this under a pressure of 3,000 pounds to the square inch. Then there will be a duplicate number of drums to leave at the camp so that we can inflate a second time."

Bob smiled.

"If this were compressed air," went on Ned, "it would mean a considerable load. A cubic foot of air at 60 degrees temperature weighs .0807 pounds, and 65,000 feet would weigh over 5,000 pounds. Double that would give us a load of five tons. But hydrogen is only one-sixteenth the weight of air. Therefore, the gas we are going to load on our burros will weigh only a little over three hundred pounds."

"I'll try to remember," interrupted Bob soberly, "when it comes to writing up the expedition."

"You must remember, too," added Ned, "that it is going to require twenty-four steel drums to hold this and that each will weigh at least two hundred pounds."

"Not so easy after all," said Bob. "But how about this dash to the mesa? Have you got a sign up to show where it is? To me all those peaks and canyons look pretty much alike."

"And to us also," answered Ned. "But, you see, we know the exact latitude and longitude."

"Just like a ship!" exclaimed Bob.

"Precisely," answered Ned. "That's what our sextant did for us."

Bob's eyes sparkled with amazement.

"Well, who would have thought of that!" he exclaimed.

Both Ned and Alan smiled.

"The south point of our mesa is in longitude 109 degrees, 7 minutes and 30 seconds west—" continued Ned.

Bob tried to look as if he understood, but the explanation was quite lost upon him.

"The latitude," went on Ned, "is 36 degrees, 44 minutes and 25 seconds north. Now you have it. Go and find your treasure."

"I'd like to know how you're going to find that point even if you do know there is such a place," was Bob's reply.

"In two ways," explained Ned. "We have already learned from the Survey Department at Washington that the point of juncture between Colorado, Utah, New Mexico and Arizona is 109 degrees, 7 minutes, 30 seconds west longitude and 37 degrees north latitude. If we can locate the boundary monument near Ute Mountain it will then be a matter of the compass. Allowing 69.16 miles to a degree of longitude and 68.93 miles to a degree of latitude our mesa must lie 34.5 miles

south and 17.79 miles west of where these states and territories join."

"And what if you don't find the boundary monument?" asked Bob.

"We have a new sextant, and another observation will give us a new starting point. As long as we know one point we can find another by laying out our course with a compass, just as a ship captain would, allowing of course for the variation of the compass needle in that locality."

"And I suppose you've invented some sort of telescoping ladder that is going to take you magically to the top of the mesa?" suggested Bob, who was bound not to be surprised at anything.

"Better than that," answered Alan. "A little balloon ascension will do it. We were lucky enough to find a small, ready-made gas balloon bag in this city. It holds less than 10,000 cubic feet of gas and can be carried in a small trunk. We are going to inflate this and let it up at the end of a rope. It is big enough to carry one of us."

"The rest will be easy," went on Ned. "In the tunnel mouth we left ropes. One of these lowered will bring up our new rope ladder. Then we have only to draw up our supplies and we are ready to put the *Cibola* in commission again."

Coming after his previous experience Ned Na-

pier's resourceful inventions and ideas did not astonish Bob. He had begun to accept the most startling schemes as commonplaces.

They now went in to luncheon, and Bob forgot for the moment his eager and as yet unsatisfied curiosity in the pleasure of meeting Ned's mother. Mrs. Napier, who had the greatest confidence in her son, did not seem concerned over the danger that the boys might encounter.

"But what is the use of money," she argued, "at the expense of education? Both Ned and Alan ought to be in school," she went on, "and I've only consented to Ned's going on the condition that he makes up for his lost time by extra work. Both he and Alan graduate from the high school next spring and I'd rather have them do that with honor than bring back a wagon-load of silver and gold—"

"Or dusty mummies," laughed Alan.

Luncheon over, the three exuberant boys started for the city to visit the camp outfitter's and to revel in the fascinating details of their camp kit and stores.

"We learned a good many things on that first trip," explained Ned, "and I suppose you did, too," he added, turning to Bob. "This time you don't want to start out in tan shoes and a straw hat. There are a good many things we took that

time that we are not taking this time. But, after all, it is rather simple. Senor Oje is going to provide everything needed in the camp on McElmo. We are arranging only the outfit for the dash into the mountains and plan to take only the material we need for that trip and for the removal of the waiting treasure."

"And, by the way," interrupted Alan, "do you remember what Senor Oje said? We reach Dolores at noon and are to begin the wagon trip with a cowboy breakfast cooked by 'Salty Bill' Donnelly."

"That sounds bad," interrupted Bob.

"'Salty Bill'," explained Ned, "is another 'Buck' Bourke. Senor Oje says he is the best chuck wagon cook on the range. And before his cook days he was a freighter, just like Buck. They say he is a real relic of the old days; knows everything there is to know about the plains and couldn't be lost in the wilderness with his eyes bandaged."

"And he goes with us?" asked Bob.

"We go with him, I guess," answered Alan.

From the moment when Ned and Alan had made the report of their wonderful discovery to Senor Oje and Major Honeywell, the boys had been busy on plans for the second trip.

Each gas cylinder tube contained three cubic

feet and was about four feet long. When arrangements had been made to have these drums charged with pure hydrogen gas and the order had been placed for the strong hundred-foot rope-ladder, the heaviest work was under way. The order for the camp equipage and provisions had been placed with an expert and they were being packed in form suitable for burro transportation. A new sextant had been secured, a good compass purchased and a new outfit of firearms arranged for. All this baggage was to precede the boys by express to Dolores.

"As this is to be mountain work and it is getting into autumn and we may be gone a month or more," Ned explained to Bob, "we need a little heavier clothing than we used before."

He gave Bob the list that he and Alan had made for themselves and Elmer. It included a medium weight rough suit of clothes, an extra pair of trousers, two woolen outing shirts, two suits of flannel underwear, two pairs of socks, two towels, two handkerchiefs, a light rubber rain coat, a pair of laced waterproof knee hunting boots, a soft hat, a woolen sweater, a ditty bag containing toilet articles, and two blankets each.

"And," explained Ned, "let everything be of grey or brown—no reds or blues to attract the eye. We are not looking for game, but we know

that it is just as well not to advertise ourselves to the Indians. Our dash is going to take us right through the heart of the Southern Ute reservation."

"And," added Alan to Bob, "don't forget a padded canteen, a waterproof match box, a small compass of your own and a good hunting knife."

The boys reached the outfitters just in time to see the boxed camp equipment and provisions leaving for the express office. At first Bob was somewhat disappointed.

"Is that all you are going to take?" he asked, pointing to the single box marked "Camp and Mess Outfit."

Ned laughed and showed him what was in the case—one 9 by 9 khaki tent with floor cloth and fly, guys and iron stakes; a folding pocket ax; a miner's coffee pot; three block tin camp kettles with riveted handles so arranged as to form a roasting oven; one skillet; one bake pan; and four each of plates, cups, knives, forks and spoons.

"That's where I miss out," laughed Bob, when he saw the eating utensils, "but I'll take my own."

"Don't you bother about that," suggested Ned, "the man who can't improvise those things ought not try camp life."

Then came a coil of rope, a coil of wire, and such small cooking utensils as salt, pepper and

flour dredges, a cooking spoon, a fork, a ladle, a can opener and a whetstone.

"I guess that'll do," exclaimed Bob at last. "Looks as good as a hotel to me."

"Well," said Ned, "old timers don't 'rough it' any more. Now they 'smooth it.' And we want to be comfortable at least."

"And food?" asked Bob with renewed interest.

Ned pointed to two tin-lined ration chests, each weighing with their contents about a hundred and twenty-five pounds. "In there," he explained. "Each case contains more than enough for four men for five days. We shan't suffer unless our pack animals bolt with the boxes."

Each chest contained, packed in air tight or tin packages, the following:

20 lbs. self-raising flour.	6 boxes matches.
6 lbs. fresh biscuit.	1 lb. soap.
6 lbs. corn meal.	1 lb. corn starch.
6 lbs. navy beans.	3 lbs. preserved butter.
3 lbs. rice.	3 lbs. dried fruit.
5 lbs. salt pork.	1½ gal. pickles.
5 lbs. bacon.	1½ gal. preserves.
10 lbs. ham.	1 quart syrup.
15 lbs. potatoes.	1 box pepper.
6 lbs. onions.	1 box mustard.
6 lbs. coffee.	1 lb. candles.

6 lbs. sugar.	1 jar cheese.
1/2 lb. tea.	1 box ginger.
1/2 lb. baking powder.	1 box allspice.
1/2 lb. baking soda.	1 lb. currants.
4 cans condensed cream.	1 lb. raisins.
1 sack salt.	6 boxes sardines.

“I’m satisfied,” exclaimed Bob, when he had finished reading the list. “With Elmer’s culinary skill and all these things I guess we won’t need any soup tablets this time.”

CHAPTER III

A CHUCK WAGON BREAKFAST

That portion of Arizona lying northwest of the impassable depths of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado is a region known as "No Man's Land." The sterile waste of its Paria, Kanab and Sanur Plateaus is today the refuge of only white outlaws. Even the red man has abandoned the desert, valleys and canyons, uninviting alike to the settler, the prospector and the hunter.

Just east of the almost unmeasured chasm of the Grand Canyon a stretch of sandy plains loses itself in a broken country. This, in turn, becomes rougher until hills and mesas give place to a chaos of mountains. When the northeastern corner of Arizona is reached these irregular ranges leap suddenly into the mass of peaks and plateaus known as the Tunit Chas.

Therein, and extending into the plains on both sides, is the immense Indian reservation set aside by the United States for the use of the Navajos. In its uncharted valleys, slopes and table lands no less than sixteen thousand Navajos make their home. Nowhere into that region has the foot of the white man advanced. Not even an Indian

town varies the mystifying monotony of the untracked wild. Here and there, in sequestered valleys and near springs or water courses, a few Indian families may be found encamped temporarily together. But, aside from these isolated settlements, this rocky playground of Nature knows no life but that of the wild animal.

From this region come many tales; legends of the Indian as he yet adheres to the life and customs of the savage aborigine—strange and cruel religious rites and ever-present jealousy of the white man's approach. Among these tales are some of murdered men, and the traveler who would brave the perils of the unblazed heights of the Tunit Chas and the surrounding deserts should know of the many white men who have disappeared into this wilderness never to return.

Here the deadly rattlesnake basks in venomous plenitude; here alone, in America, skulk bands of wild dogs more savage than timber wolves, more tenacious than bull-dogs, and with a bite as fatal as the rattlesnake's; here, too—according to camp-fire tales—wander, ghostlike, the last of many camels introduced into this region forty years ago; here abounds rare game prized by the hunter and the trapper; and here the bear, the mountain sheep and the lion roam forests and crags yet untrailed and primeval.

In such a land Ned Napier and Alan Hope had found the mesa of the Turquoise Temple and its treasure and into it they were now about to venture once more. None knew better than they the dangers that might be encountered, yet the boys had already heard the "call of the wild" and for them peril no longer counted.

At eight o'clock on the evening of September 25 Major Baldwin Honeywell, Ned, Alan, and Elmer Grissom left Chicago on the Denver Express. In addition to the baggage that preceded them Ned and Alan had a trunk packed with their "campaign" clothes, as they called them. In addition Ned had a small new, iron-bound trunk containing a carefully selected set of iron and wood-working tools from his shop and a few mysterious packages, the contents of which he had not revealed to anyone.

Bob Russell joined the party in Kansas City at nine o'clock the next morning. On the succeeding morning, at ten o'clock, the "Napier Expedition," as Bob liked to call it, reached Denver. At seven o'clock on the same evening they boarded the train that was to carry them through the mountains to Dolores, the edge of civilization, where Senor Oje awaited them.

"Then for that cowboy breakfast," Alan reminded them.

"And Salty Bill Donnelly," Bob added as quickly.

They had breakfast the next morning at Alamosa, in the heart of the Sangre de Cristo and Sierra Blanca mountain ranges at an elevation of eight thousand feet, and then the journey westward was continued to Durango. This daylight ride through the mountains was a joy to the four boys. First came the green San Luis Valley, out of which the narrow gauge train climbed onto the meandering loops of the "Whiplash" and then, far above the lower hills, the cars crawled along the edge of the mighty Los Pinos gulch. This was but a hint of wonders to come.

Major Honeywell had called the boys to the rear of the observation car.

"It'll clear your heads for mesa climbing," he said with a laugh.

Just then the train rounded a curve into a seeming forest of stone monoliths, and suddenly shot into a tunnel. As it emerged from the tunnel it swung onto a balcony of rock apparently suspended over the brink of the celebrated Toltec Gorge. Far down below a few scattered pines clinging here and there to the ragged granite emphasized the dark depths where a threadlike stream found its way among the icy boulders.

The boys sprang back instinctively.

"I don't mind a balloon," said Ned, "but that's too cold and dark."

"And gloomy," added Alan.

"And deep," concluded Bob.

Beyond this the train climbed higher still and then, crossing the Divide at over ten thousand feet, began the descent. As well watered valleys began to show between the rocky and barren mountains Major Honeywell called attention to moving spots of white—distant sheep flocks. They were approaching the grazing plains.

"This country," explained Major Honeywell enthusiastically, "is where we got the money that paid for the *Cibola*."

"Therefore," said Ned, lifting his cap, "I take off my hat to it. Long may its grass grow green."

The train descended lower and lower into the grazing valleys, paused for a short time at Dulce in the Jicarilla Apache land and then passed into the Southern Ute reservation. At the little town of Ignacio (named for a mighty chief of the Utes) it stopped in sight of the agency headquarters. A dozen or more squaws and men were squatted on the adobe station platform with crude pottery and many colored bead articles exposed for sale.

Major Honeywell and the boys alighted from the train.

"That's the Ute agency over there," explained the Major, pointing to a two-story building opposite the depot, "and there seems to be something unusual going on," he added. A dozen horses, a few closely blanketed Indians and three or four white men were grouped just in front of the entrance.

"Yes," explained a man lounging in the door of the baggage room, "and I guess they's agoin' to be something more unusualler."

"What's up?" inquired Ned eagerly, his mind full of the tragedy that had resulted in the death of their guide Buck a few weeks before, which he had always believed was the work of Ute Indians.

"Well," drawled the loungee, "a posse o' white men from the south hev been a shootin' up the Utes down on the line."

"Where from?" interrupted Ned. "And what for?"

"As I git it," explained the man, "they was from over south o' the mountains, Clarkeville, I guess. And I heerd that the Utes killed one o' their freighters and stampeded his horses down on the Amarillo."

"It's Mayor Bradley and his friends," exclaimed Ned, "and they're getting revenge for old Buck's death."

"I reckon ye'r right," went on the Ignacio cit-

izen. "They sartin shot a swath through the Utes. Some o' the head men air up yar tryin' to git help. But I reckon the row is about over now exceptin' what the Utes do when they git good and drunk."

"Are the Utes making trouble?" asked Major Honeywell anxiously. "Have any of them left the reservation?"

"What ain't yar is aridin' in circles lookin' fur gore, I calkerlate," replied the lounge. "The agent is sendin' out a gang o' deputies today to ca'm 'em down ef he kin."

Just then the train started and the boys and the Major sprang aboard.

When it was well under way again Alan said: "Looks as if we were getting here just in time—for trouble."

"One time is as good as another for that, with the Utes," soberly answered the Major. "I'm sorry to hear this."

"That fellow Bradley certainly means business when he gets started," interrupted Bob Russell. "And what he and his friends have done to avenge old Buck I'll bet was a plenty."

The episode cast a little damper on the travelers who, all day, had been viewing the grandest mountain scenery in the world as if they were merely curious tourists. The Major especially

was now inclined to be silent. But Indians on the warpath—so long at least as they were somewhat remote—could not alarm boys like those of the “Napier Expedition”; and new sights soon gave the boys new thoughts.

The train had swung down into New Mexico in passing through the corner of the Ute reservation, but now, later in the afternoon, it had wound its way back again into Colorado. It traversed bottom lands of willows and grass, sage brush and sprawling cedar and pinon—the Florida and Animas valleys, once desert, but now fast turning green as a result of the irrigation canals. Then another short grade was ascended and at six o'clock the train stopped for the night at Durango. The last stage of the journey was to be made the next day.

No sooner were the boys and their new companion comfortably established in the hotel than Major Honeywell sought the telephone and called up the Ute agent at Ignacio. While the boys clamored for supper the old soldier waited patiently for his connection. After a long delay it was given him, but the boys did not hear the conversation. When the Major came from the interview he was in no cheerful mood.

“Mr. Wyburn, the agent, disapproves of any attempt to pass through the reservation,” Major

Honeywell explained, when they were all seated at the table.

"Does he prohibit it?" asked Ned anxiously.

"No, not exactly, after I told him who I was and that we were with Senor Oje," said the Major, "but he said that he would not be responsible for the consequences if we did it."

"Humph," exclaimed Ned, "I'd rather tackle a drunken brawler than a sober horse thief."

"Well," said Major Honeywell, "we will be governed by circumstances."

At half-past seven the next morning the journey by rail was resumed. Bob ate a light breakfast.

"Remember," he cautioned the party, "we get to Dolores at one o'clock and you want to be ready to do justice to Salty Bill's cowboy breakfast."

"I don't need to fast all day to do that," laughingly answered Alan. "This mountain air is sauce enough for me."

It was only sixty miles from Durango to Dolores, but it took the laboring train five hours to cover the distance. The wonders of the journey had begun to pall a little upon the impatient lads. The Paradox Divide, the beautiful Mancos Valley and even Lost Canyon did not wholly

claim their attention. They were eager to reach the end of their rail journey and to start on the trail again, in the face of Ute uprisings or any other dangers that might threaten.

In the little town of Dolores, perched on the mountain side and on the banks of the Dolores River, there was also some impatience. Senor Oje's ranch, located six miles from the town, had been early astir that day. Salty Bill Donnelly, summoned hastily from his home in Mancos, had reported to his old friend and employer the day before. It mattered little to Salty Bill whether his work involved a journey of five miles or five hundred. When he had ridden up to the ranch the day before, on Spot, his calico cayuse, and had been told that he was to head a party to the Tunit Chas the next day, he had had neither comment nor preparation to make.

With his rope, blanket, Colt and canteen he would, if necessary, have started on the trail at once, and trusted to luck for food. But when he learned that he was to uphold his reputation as a cook with a cowboy breakfast for Colonel Oje's guests he looked at the matter in another light.

"Colonel," he said, "I ain't cooked none in five year."

"Salty," replied Senor Oje, "you couldn't for-

get the fringe of your cooking in twenty years."

"Well, it won't be nothin' but chuck. An' that reminds me—"

"Not now, Salty—no stories now"; for that was Salty's weakness. "The chuck wagon's stocked. But you'd better go out and look it over. You can get into Dolores the first thing in the morning. Have breakfast ready when the noon train arrives."

"Breakfast at noon?" roared Salty Bill.

"Call it what you like," laughed the Mexican rancher, "grub, chuck or beans. But have it hot and plenty."

"Do you want beans, Colonel?" asked Salty Bill suddenly.

"Certainly. It wouldn't be a cowboy meal without beans."

"Then I'll hev to start tonight. There ain't agoin' to be no boiled beans set out by me. Ye've got to cook beans in the ground at night. Ye know that, I reckon. Why—"

"All right, Salty!" laughed the sheep-owner. "Start when you like."

Before dark Senor Oje's best chuck wagon was parked not far from the Dolores station and Salty Bill got to work. A space was cleared at the end of the wagon where the provisions could be laid out conveniently; the pot rack was swung

and a fire was set blazing. In a big black pot the beans were soon on a boil. Salty Bill and his helper, John Rico, supped luxuriously on coffee, hardtack, salt pork and preserved peaches, and then, joined by a few old time friends from the town, with pipes lit, they sat about the bean fire, traded yarns and sang songs until midnight. The coffee-pot was kept simmering and Salty's stories grew better as the beans bubbled.

But at twelve o'clock the party was dismissed.

"I hate to do it, boys," explained Salty, "but I've got important work tomorrer."

Then the already fragrant beans were turned into the waiting pot with a giant chunk of pork and Salty's secret seasoning, buried in a hole dug in the coals, and covered with smoking ashes; and rolling themselves in their blankets Salty and his assistant slept by the fire.

A few moments before the train was due the next day a monster pan of Salty's famous French fried potatoes was ready. Likewise the big coffee-pot was emitting puffs of odorous vapor. When the smoke of the engine was seen far down the track the first batch of five dozen biscuits disappeared in the big, hot Dutch oven.

"An' ev'ry one patted out round and smooth with my own hand," explained Salty later. "I wouldn't let no one else do that. Anybody kin

toss up a batch o' biskits," continued Salty, "but 't ain't but mighty few kin pat 'em out jist right."

As the train drew up to the station Salty turned to John Rico as did Dewey at Manila.

"Let 'em go, Jack," he ordered; and on the word the excited Rico dropped into the second Dutch oven, heated to a degree, three T-bone steaks such as a butcher shop seldom sees.

And that was Salty Bill's cowboy breakfast. To this day, when Ned Napier, Alan Hope and Bob Russell fall into reminiscences, they still dispute as to what should receive chief honor, Salty's biscuits, the beans, or the T-bone steaks. And a final decision has never been reached.

CHAPTER IV

THE DETECTION OF BLUE HORSE

When the long-awaited-for breakfast was over, and Salty Bill Donnelly and John Rico had broken the chuck camp, Colonel Oje—for as such he was known in Dolores,—Major Honeywell, and the boys hastened to the express office, which was in the depot. It was fairly bulging with the “Napier Expedition” outfit. The two dozen steel drums of hydrogen, the casks of gasoline, the camp outfit and the provisions, with sundry smaller packages, had arrived safely only the day before. Within two blocks stood the new Dolores National Bank, a stone building. Above it were the business offices of Colonel Oje. And to these rooms, at Senor Oje’s suggestion, the personal baggage of the boys was at once taken.

Senor Oje was smoking his usual black cigar. The success of the breakfast and the exuberant spirits of the boys seemed to please him mightily.

“I suppose I had better take charge until you are ready for your mountain work,” he said to Ned. “Then I’ll resign as commander.”

Ned gave ready assent to this.

"Then I suggest that you boys get out of your city clothes and leave your fancy duds here until you return. I have a freight wagon all ready to load up with the stuff at the station. When this is aboard Dan Mears will start with it at once for Cortez. That's about twelve miles from here, in the Montezuma Valley. John Rico will drive the chuck wagon. As soon as Salty Bill has cleaned up the breakfast mess he will ride over to my ranch. When you are ready we will follow him—it's six miles west of here and we can make it in a few minutes in my car. At the ranch Salty Bill will help you boys pick out a pony apiece, and when you are fixed he'll conduct you by a short cut through the pinon to the valley below and to Cortez. You ought to get there as soon as the wagons. Major Honeywell and I will return in the car and follow the wagon trail to Cortez, where there is a little hotel. We'll have supper there and sleep in Cortez. Then, early tomorrow morning, we'll be off for Ute Mountain. The Major and I will leave the car at Cortez and travel with John Rico on the chuck wagon. You boys shall be our escort."

It sounded like the program of a holiday excursion.

"I don't know how we are ever going to be grateful enough—" began Ned, but Major Hon-

eywell, his mind busy with the thoughts of an old soldier and Indian fighter, interrupted him. There had been no time to speak to Senor Oje of the news they had had of the Ute trouble; and now the Major insisted on relating it and holding a council of war.

"I've heard all that and more," replied the Mexican. "But there is never a time when we are not having more or less trouble with the Utes. All I can say is this: We have Salty Bill Donnelly with us. After we reach McElmo Canyon, if he says 'go ahead,' I'll consent. If he says it is dangerous, that will settle it; I'll vote to postpone the trip."

Bob Russell, Alan and the colored boy, Elmer Grissom, were already in an inner room changing their clothes while Senor Oje, Major Honeywell and Ned paused in the main office. On the wall hung a large new Indian Reservation and Forest Reserve map of the United States.

"You will notice," went on Senor Oje, pointing to the district they were about to enter, "that Ute Mountain, near which we have planned to make our camp on McElmo Canyon, is almost on the Utah and Colorado lines. At this point the Ute reservation narrows to not much more than fifteen miles. It is a wild and mountainous district, somewhat east of the usual haunts of the

trouble-makers. Once through that district, you boys will be in Navajo country. I can't say that you will be exactly safe in the Navajo reservation, but it is as safe there now as it ever is. You'll surely be safe from the Utes, who wouldn't cross the Navajo line any sooner than a rattler would cross a lariat."

"Well," said Ned after a few moments' thought, "I'm not very old, and I've not had the experience you gentlemen have had, and it's only right that we should do exactly as your judgment advises. But I want to say this: I've read a good deal and I'm fond of the books that tell how men who do things get ahead. I think you'll both agree with me that the men who turn back in the face of danger are always turning back."

Both men smiled.

"That's the spirit, Ned," exclaimed Major Honeywell. "That's what took Stanley through Africa. But you must think of others too. Your mother can't afford to lose you."

Ned was silent some time, for he was in no sense given to rashness or braggadocio.

"Well," he said at last, "ever since I was old enough to have ambition I have wanted to rise. I don't believe anyone can do that by doing the things that everyone else does. These Indians are in the wrong. There is no reason why they should

molest us. We mean them no harm and we have the right on our side. I think we have courage and brains on our side too. If you won't think me too bold I'd like to ask you both to consent to our going ahead. We are certainly not afraid."

His elders looked at each other.

"What can you say to that, Major?" said Senor Oje finally.

The military man smiled faintly. "Soldiers," he answered, "don't count so much on the justness of their cause as on their strength. I'm only half persuaded. But I approve of going ahead to Ute Mountain. Then we can decide positively."

Ned hastened into the adjoining room to join his friends and change his clothes. A few moments later the four boys were at the station assisting in the loading of the freight wagon. Stout laced boots, khaki trousers loosely made in the fashion of riding breeches, grey flannel shirts and soft hats, gave them an appearance like that of Uncle Sam's soldiers. Salty Bill's calico cayuse had already disappeared around a shoulder of the mountains in the direction of the Oje home ranch, and while the boys were yet busy with the gas drums and boxes Senor Oje drove up in his grey sixty-horse-power touring car. He cautioned Dan Mears against the danger of fire near the gasoline, and against tampering with the valves

of the gas drums, and then the four-horse freight wagon took up the mountain trail road at a little after three o'clock, and, close behind John Rico's chuck wagon, set out for Cortez, the night rendezvous in Montezuma valley.

Then the boys had the novelty of a motor ride in the mountains. Stowed away in the big car, they saw the little town shut out behind the mountains, and then, as the well-made road turned the shoulder of rock behind which Salty Bill had just disappeared, and the fertile Montezuma valley unrolled to their gaze, exclamations of delight came from all at once. Below the pinon timber, through which the trail ran, grassy slopes extended downward in undulating waves of emerald richness. Here and there the silvery lines of irrigating canals threaded their way between fruit farms and grain fields, and then, beyond, the misty green of vegetation faded into the golden grey of the plains which, on the far horizon, merged into the haze of the Utah desert. Far to the southwest, like a pointed cloud, a solitary peak marked the horizon.

"Ute Mountain," explained Senor Oje.

"And beyond that?" asked Ned, pointing to a dark break in the sky line.

"The Tunit Chas."

In a short time the wagon trail turned to the

right and the view of the valley was for the moment lost. As the occupants of the car glanced forward they were surprised to see two horsemen a short distance ahead, standing in a widened portion of the road as if awaiting the car.

"Hello," exclaimed Senor Oje. "It's Salty Bill and—"

He did not finish his remark at once. But, as the car drew near and slowed down, it could be seen that Salty Bill's companion was an Indian. This was not apparent at once for the reason that the red man was dressed much like a white man. But his typical features, the two jet-black bands of hair that fell over his ears from beneath his soft white hat, a silver-studded belt, and his mocasins told the man's race.

"And Blue Horse," continued Senor Oje with marked surprise in his voice. As the machine came to a stop Elmer Grissom sprang to his feet. With trembling lips, his eyes seemingly glued on the stolid Indian, the colored boy grasped Senor Oje's shoulder.

"Dat's him," he exclaimed thickly. "Dat's de Indian!"

Everyone stood up in excitement. "Dat's de Indian we see on de Amarillo," repeated Elmer.

Senor Oje turned. "What do you mean?" he asked quickly.

"Dat's de man as wanted whisky," went on Elmer, shaking with the excitement of his discovery. "He came to us de night Buck and me was camped on de Amarillo. He's one of Buck's murderers."

As he made the astounding declaration all sprang from the car.

"One of Buck's murderers?" repeated Senor Oje. "Are you sure, boy? This is Blue Horse. He's the only Indian I ever trusted. Why, he has worked for me for years. He belongs to my Mesa Verde ranch outfit."

"Sho!" exclaimed Elmer. "He's de fust real Indian I ever see. I kain't fergit him."

The Indian, if he understood, gave no sign of concern. He sat stolid and unspeaking.

"Salty," exclaimed Senor Oje suddenly and in a tone the boys had never heard him use before, "what's Blue Horse doing here?"

"I met him on his way from the ranch to see ye in Dolores," Salty Bill explained. "He come in today from the valley. He says he come to tell ye that thar's trouble at the Verde ranch. Foreman Trimble sent him. Thar's sheep thieves around and they've been cuttin' out ewes. That right?" queried Salty, turning sharply to the Indian.

The latter nodded his head. "And Trimble says he thought ye might want to tell Agent Wyburn."

"Is it Injuns?" snapped Senor Oje.

Blue Horse again nodded approval.

"Utes?" exclaimed the Mexican, advancing to the mounted red man.

"Utes," answered the Indian, speaking for the first time.

Then the usually quiet-spoken ranch owner suddenly broke into a new question, but this time in the Indian tongue.

"He's askin' him ef he ain't got no letter," volunteered Salty Bill.

But the Indian shook his head. Senor Oje eyed him a moment and then, in response to an apparent command, the red man slowly dismounted from his pony, laid the rifle he carried and a revolver on the ground at the Mexican's feet and folded his arms.

"Now, my son," said Senor Oje in a softer voice, taking Elmer by the arm and leading him up to the Indian, "tell me your story."

"Buck and me," began Elmer nervously, "had charge ob Ned's freight wagon on de first expedition. We was to meet de balloon at de jinin' ob de Amarillo and Chusco ribbers an' we went

into camp dar on de 11th ob August. Jes' afore sundown dis Indian rid into de camp. He said he was a Navajo and dat we was on dar reservation. Den he wanted whisky and when he didn't git it he rid away. Dat night we was attacked by Indians. Buck was killed, de horses was stoled and I jest escaped ca'se de boys rescued me."

Again Senor Oje spoke rapidly to the Indian in his own tongue. The motionless savage answered in the same language.

"He says he is a good Indian," explained Salty to the others. Senor Oje paused as if in doubt.

"Look at de hat," exclaimed Elmer, suddenly, grasping Senor Oje's shoulder.

Ned sprang forward. "He's right," exclaimed Ned. "I remember that hat. I know it because I was sorry I hadn't one like it."

Without a word Senor Oje stepped to the silent Blue Horse and caught the hat in his hand. Not even then did the Indian's face show either fear or agitation. As the ranch owner and the two boys bent over the head gear—always the chief pride of the true plainsman—Blue Horse's guilt was fixed. Just above the leather band buckle, as if traced with an indelible pencil, were the letters "B. B." in a circle.

"The 'Broken Circle' brand," suggested Salty Bill, pointing to a break in the irregular ring.

"That's it," exclaimed Alan who was now in the group. "Don't you remember? The 'Broken Circle.' That's Mayor Curt Bradley's cattle brand and Buck used to work for him."

Without comment Senor Oje motioned all into the automobile. Then he picked up Blue Horse's rifle and revolver and placed them on the floor of the car. Advancing to the still stolid horse-thief he ran his hands deftly through the Indian's clothes and took from him a knife and its scabbard. Then he signed to Blue Horse to mount. Salty Bill also sprang on his pony.

"Salty," said the now hard-faced ranchman at last, "bring Blue Horse to the ranch. If he tries to escape, shoot him."

"Are you going to arrest him?" asked Ned as the car started.

The stern look had faded from the wealthy ranchman's face.

"Perhaps," he answered. "We'll talk it over later."

"He'd ought to be shot," exclaimed Elmer.

"No doubt," smilingly answered Senor Oje, "where there is plenty of law and justice."

Senor Oje's wife and daughter were in the East, but the reception accorded the boys at the ranch showed that they were not unexpected by the servants. Between the attractions of the

model ranch with its long, low-galleried house in Spanish style, its dozens of out-buildings, barns, shops and corrals, and the valley spread out below like a panorama, the boys hardly knew what to exclaim over first.

"I'm sorry we are going away so soon," frankly exclaimed Ned as they alighted from the car and turned to drink in the picture before them.

"Well," said Senor Oje, "I don't know why you need go at once. This Blue Horse business rather upsets calculations, and I'd like time to think it over. Why not wait until tomorrow? How about it, Major?"

"Stay, by all means," laughed Major Honeywell. As the face of each boy showed how glad he was to make this break in the journey Major Honeywell motioned them to the far end of the gallery, where a square mission table stood in a circle of easy-chairs.

"Have you got it handy?" exclaimed the Major, turning to Senor Oje. The latter seemed to understand, and stepping into what was apparently a library opening onto the gallery, he returned in a moment with a round Indian jar.

"That's it," added Major Honeywell, placing the bit of pottery on the little table, "and this is where we opened it almost a year ago. Boys, that is the cause of all our good and bad fortune." As

he spoke he pointed to the letters "Miguel Vasquez" in black on the side of the vessel. "That's what held our secret of the Turquoise Temple. That's what sent you boys in search of treasure. That's what sent good old Buck to his death. Its secret has brought us all out here again."

Ned took the vase in his hands while the other boys crowded close around. Then he held it up so that all might see.

"And I give," began Ned, "this tribute to old Miguel Vasquez, dead these three hundred and fifty years; here's to the memory of a man who did much for those who came after him, because he went on when others stopped."

"Amen," said Major Honeywell. "I surrender. I guess I'll have to vote to go ahead—danger or no danger."

CHAPTER V

WHY BLUE HORSE WAS RELEASED

When Salty Bill Donnelly, a little later, came slowly up the ranch road with Blue Horse riding just ahead of him, Senor Oje and his guests were on the gallery. The ranch owner arose, as the captor and his prisoner came to a halt at the end of the gallery, and walked slowly to the two men. Again he addressed the Ute in his own tongue. But the red man's reply did not seem to help Senor Oje toward any decision. He gave a sudden order to Salty Bill and the cook and guide resumed charge of the prisoner and led him to the rear of the ranch house.

"Ain't you gwine to lock him up or tie him?" asked Elmer.

Major Honeywell smiled.

"That's not necessary," answered Senor Oje. "I've told him not to leave."

"Will that keep him here?" inquired Bob Russell.

It was now Senor Oje's turn to smile. But Major Honeywell answered:

"The Indian world of the West isn't big enough," explained the old soldier, "to hide a man

that Senor Oje wants. And this Indian knows it. I could tell you a story—”

Before he could say more Senor Oje, his face that of the plain business man once more, interrupted his friend.

“Now,” he exclaimed, “you boys go to the horse lot and pick out your ponies. And don’t go by looks,” he added laughingly. “Take Salty Bill’s advice. He’ll rope the ones you want.”

“I wonder what that story was?” said Ned as the four boys took their host’s advice and hastened after Salty Bill and the Indian.

“I don’t know,” answered Bob, “but I can imagine. Did you notice Senor Oje’s face when he saw the letters on that hat? I’d hate to go against him when he’s got his dander up—that’s all.”

“Well, it sent cold chills over me,” commented Alan. “And when Major Honeywell began that story and I saw how quickly Senor Oje switched him off, I felt as if the ranchman must somehow have lived two lives.”

“And in the one we don’t know anything about,” quickly added Bob, “if a man, red, white or black, did him any harm, I’ll wager Senor Oje didn’t wait for the law to give him justice. He seems to me just the kind of a man who would follow an Indian for weeks—even to his last hid-

ing place—and then—well, I'd not care to be the man he was after."

Blue Horse and Salty Bill had dismounted near the pony corral. When the boys explained what was to be done Salty Bill responded with alacrity. He apparently gave no further thought to the Indian, who, left to himself, moved out of sight among the out-buildings.

Seen through a crack in the corral fence the barn bunch of Oje's stock seemed dreaming, with heads hanging and eyes half closed. But the moment Salty Bill entered the enclosure, lariat in hand, there was a scamper, a cloud of dust and the herd shot away to the far end of the corral.

"That fellow in front'll do for me," shouted the exuberant Bob, pointing to a sorrel that led the bunch. Then followed the roping of that animal, and it did not take Salty Bill long to do it. After that a stout halter was put on Bob's sorrel and he led the spirited little beast into a corner.

"And you?" asked Salty Bill, nodding to Ned.

"Give me the last one," laughed Ned. "Bob can have 'Old Speedy'—I'm satisfied with 'Old Sure Foot.'"

His halter soon held a steady looking bay pony.

When it was Alan's turn he said he would go in for looks, and he selected a beautiful coal black animal.

"If you all's done," said Elmer at last, "I'se gwine show you how sma't I is. Gib me de calico boy same as Salty Bill rides."

The stabling of the animals, preparatory to an early start the next day, required a little time. Salty Bill then showed the boys the interesting equipment of the ranch—one of several operated by Senor Oje. Almost everywhere the boys went they saw Blue Horse just turning the corner ahead of them. The freedom allowed to the Indian puzzled the young adventurers.

When they returned to the front of the ranch house evening was coming on. Shadows were rolling like waves down the mountain sides into the valley beneath. Far to the southwest, a point only on the horizon, a glow of pink marked the tip of Ute Mountain. Major Honeywell and Senor Oje sat on the gallery, silently smoking.

After a few commonplace remarks Senor Oje pressed a button on the wall and ordered the Chinese boy who responded to ask Mr. Donnelly to come to him. Something in his manner betokened a crisis.

"Boys," he explained, "Major Honeywell and I have come to a conclusion in the Blue Horse matter."

When Salty Bill appeared Senor Oje nodded toward the barns and exclaimed: "Get Blue Horse."

“What you are about to see,” went on Senor Oje, turning to his young friends, “will be a bit theatric—”

Without more explanation he walked silently back and forth a few times. Even when the immobile Blue Horse slipped silently into the open space before the gallery the ranchman continued his walk without a word. Nor did he even glance at the Indian, who stood erect with folded arms.

“Mr. Donnelly,” exclaimed Senor Oje at last, addressing Salty Bill, “I’ve been off the range a good many years. I’ve just been wondering if I could handle the knife as we used to.” He stepped to the cook and took from his belt a keen hunting and cook knife. It was a long, two-edged weapon. “Give me a mark at forty paces.”

While the eyes of the spectators opened in wonder Salty Bill looked hurriedly about. “Here,” added Senor Oje, taking a small business card from a case in his pocket. “On that tree,” pointing to a cottonwood something over a hundred feet away.

Salty Bill affixed the card on the tree under a loose piece of bark with some difficulty, and then stepped aside. Senor Oje had turned his back upon the target and stood as if examining the weapon in his hands. Thus several moments passed. Ned said afterwards that he could see

the form of the Mexican growing tense like a coiled spring. Then, with a whirl like the snap of a whip and a flashlike lunge forward, there was a silver streak in the air and the knife sank deep into the solid tree. The card fell to the ground cut clean into two parts.

What did it mean? If it concerned Blue Horse the Indian gave no sign.

Senor Oje, unperturbed, lit one of his black cigars. Stepping from the gallery he met Salty Bill on the driveway. The two veteran plainsmen stood together and in full view of those on the gallery. Then the Mexican took from his pocket a silver dollar. He tossed it high in the air. Up it rose, then paused, stopped and began falling earthward. At that moment Senor Oje's right arm shot forward, grasped the Colt hanging in Salty Bill's scabbard and the click and flash of the revolver and the metallic ring in mid-air told that the shot had gone true. The bit of silver, deeply dented, fell at Blue Horse's feet.

His arms folded, the Indian gave no sign that he saw or was concerned.

Not even the boys, who sat with craned necks, felt at liberty to speak.

"I was just curious," said Senor Oje as he walked slowly into the gallery again as if musing. "One sometimes loses the trick of these things."

Seating himself again he motioned Salty Bill to a place on the edge of the gallery. The increasing glow of the ranch owner's cigar marked the fast gathering gloom. Still no one spoke.

"Blue Horse," exclaimed Senor Oje at last. "Here!"

Silently the Ute horse-thief stepped to the edge of the gallery.

"Up here!" repeated Senor Oje, with the cold incision of his other nature. With the silent glide of a panther the man advanced immediately before his interrogator. There was a sudden click and a flood of electric light burst from a group of bulbs above. For the first time the red man flinched, but he recovered instantly and even in the white glow his face was set and unmoved. Senor Oje sat at his ease. For a moment he said nothing and then, flicking the ash from his cigar, he remarked, calmly:

"Blue Horse, you lied to me. We are friends no more. You are a thief."

"No!" It was the Indian's first word.

"That's why you are a liar. You stole from my friends. The friends of the man your people killed want you. If they get you they'll hang you."

Blue Horse made no answer.

The Mexican rose from his chair and disap-

peared in the house. A moment later he returned with the rifle, revolver and knife that had been taken from the savage. To the surprise of most of the spectators the ranch owner slipped the revolver into its scabbard and thrust the rifle into the hollow of Blue Horse's arm. Then he turned to the group of wide-eyed boys.

"These young men, Blue Horse, are my friends." There was now no softness in his voice. "In two days they will pass through the Ute land. Listen! They must go and come unmolested. If—" the speaker paused, hesitated, and then continued in the Ute language. It was not a great deal that he said but, as he closed his admonition, Senor Oje leaned forward until his face almost touched that of the Indian and the words came like the thrusts of a knife. Once only the red man drew back; then his eyes fell.

"Understand?" almost whispered the white man suddenly.

"Understand!" repeated Blue Horse.

"Go!"

Without a look behind the Indian sprang from the gallery and was gone.

The boys sank back nervously into their chairs.

"I think supper is ready," exclaimed Senor Oje, once more the soft-voiced host.

As the little group passed into the house Bob

Russell, true to his profession, lingered behind. When the others were out of hearing he grasped Salty Bill by the arm.

"Say," he began excitedly, "what did the Colonel tell that horse-thief? It must have been hot stuff."

Salty Bill looked at the young reporter with a smile.

"Why do ye reckon he talked Injun?" he answered.

"So the villain could understand," replied Bob.

"No," answered Salty Bill, with another smile, "so you uns couldn't."

Bob whistled. "Oh, I see," he exclaimed. "Then you won't tell!"

"'Tain't none o' my affair," answered Salty Bill. And he too disappeared in the direction Blue Horse had taken.

The four boys bunked that night in a dormitory. When they were at last alone and Bob had told his experience with Salty Bill, Ned said:

"Good for him! You got what was coming to you."

"Just the same," went on Bob, somewhat nettled, "I'll bet I could write out that speech and get the sense if I did miss the words." As he said this he caught sleepy Elmer, who was half undressed, and jokingly whirled the boy out into

the middle of the floor. Then, taking the attitude and the voice of Senor Oje, as well as he could, he hissed:

“And if my friends are molested or troubled in any manner, by your people, you’ve got to answer to me. If any Ute touches a hair of my friends you’ve got to settle for it—and to me. Understand? To me! I’ll follow you through every canyon and desert until I find you and when I do—” here Bob shook his finger in poor Elmer’s face and continued sepulchrally—“I’ll cut your heart into a hundred pieces and feed it to the starving dogs. Understand?”

“Look yar,” roared Elmer, struggling, “what you all tryin’ to do? Make me see ghoses tonight? Loosen me. I ain’t done nothin’.”

When the laughter had subsided and Elmer had been calmed, Alan exclaimed: “At least we can understand now what Major Honeywell meant. He was going to tell of something Senor Oje had once done.”

“Yes,” added Ned. “If I were Blue Horse I think I’d do as he suggested.”

“And Blue Horse will,” concluded Bob, releasing the colored boy. “You mark my word. That Indian is making tracks for the reservation this minute. We’ll go through Ute land as peacefully as if it were a public park.”

The boys were ready for an early start the next morning, but Senor Oje said that there was no particular hurry.

"I think we'll give Blue Horse a little time to get busy," he added, laughing. "It's only about twenty miles from here to Cortez where we meet our freight wagons, and we'll take the day for the trip. Tomorrow morning we'll start from Cortez and go on slowly. I think Blue Horse can help us if we give him a little time."

It was nearly noon when Salty Bill led his cavalcade down the slope on the valley trail. Major Honeywell and Senor Oje waved "good-bye" from the bluff. Then, the ranch buildings having disappeared, the Napier expedition found itself at last on the way to Indian land, the wilderness and mountains, the abandoned balloon and the waiting treasure.

CHAPTER VI

THE SHOT IN THE CANYON

The ponies did not in all cases bear out their looks. Bob's fleet courser turned out a loafing beast and Elmer's calico animal resembled Salty Bill's mount only in its spots. But all did well enough, and at about five o'clock the little train galloped into the main street of Cortez. The gray motor, standing before a house somewhat larger than its neighbors, told them that Major Honeywell and Senor Oje had already arrived and that this was the hotel. John Rico and Dan Mears were in camp on the far side of the town.

The ponies were left in the charge of the wagon men. Salty Bill preferred the camp to the hotel. The rest of the party had supper and lodging at the "Montezuma House."

At the camp early next morning everything was in motion. Breakfast was over; horses were hitched to the wagons and the ponies saddled. As the wagon men prepared seats for Major Honeywell and Senor Oje on the chuck wagon and the boys made ready to mount, the ranch owner stepped forward.

"Boys," he exclaimed good-naturedly, "so far, I've been telling you what to do. Now I salute your new commander."

As he said this he made a wide sweep of his sombrero in Ned's direction.

"Three cheers for Ned Napier!" shouted Bob Russell.

Every one gave them with a will.

With no other ceremony the boys sprang into their saddles, the wagon men cracked their whips, and with Salty Bill and Ned riding abreast in the lead the expedition took its slow course to the southwest. About the middle of the morning McElmo Creek was forded and then the train headed almost due west. At noon a brief halt was made. After that the trail grew rapidly more difficult.

When night fell the end of the journey had not been reached, but a distant glow of light grew larger and larger.

"That's the boys from the Mesa Verde ranch," explained Salty Bill to Ned. "They're in camp on McElmo Canyon."

The camp fire marked where two sheep men from one of Senor Oje's ranches were waiting with a dozen burros. The two parties came together between eight and nine o'clock.

After several conferences with Salty Bill Ned

advised Senor Oje that they had decided to start into the mountains early on the morning of the second day.

"I had supposed we would make our march by night," he explained. "But, as things have turned out—" and all knew he meant the episode of Blue Horse—"we have agreed that it would be safe and satisfactory to go in by day. Even safer day after tomorrow than tomorrow."

Salty Bill was already busy. While the tired boys inspected the diminutive burros and became acquainted with the men in charge of them—Bode Cushing and Tomichi, a half breed Jicarilla Apache—the wagon men backed the chuck wagon up to the already blazing camp fire and supper was got under way.

The camp that night was a temporary one, but it served the purpose and, about eleven o'clock, all were in their blankets and asleep. By night of the following day all confusion had given place to order. The tent that Major Honeywell and Senor Oje were to occupy had been erected on the brink of the canyon; the shelter for the wagon men had been located between the two wagons parked near by; the permanent pot rack and cook fire had been located and a supply of grease wood gathered. The equipment of the expedition had also been divided and made into

packs. The supper that night was a farewell banquet and Salty Bill's famous beans were the chief dish.

Sharp at half-past five on the following morning the camp was astir. John Rico prepared breakfast, for Salty Bill was busy with Bode Cushing and Tomichi cinching the packs and showing the four boys how it was done.

Twelve of the hydrogen drums were loaded on six burros. Two casks of gasoline formed the burden of one more. The camp outfit and provisions were carried by three animals and two were freighted with the black trunk, the rope ladder, the captive balloon and such personal baggage as the boys could not handle on their own ponies.

Salty Bill's outfit was not increased by the nature of the task before him, except as to a simple tin canteen, renewed ammunition and an extra blanket. To relieve the packs each boy carried his own sleeping combination roll—in which was packed extra clothes and a rain cape—in cowboy fashion on the back of his saddle. In addition to his revolver and belt of cartridges and patent felt canteen each boy also had some special burden: Ned, the binoculars and special compass; Alan, the emergency medical and "snake bite" outfit in a convenient leather case; Bob Russell, the cam-

era and extra film rolls and Elmer the sextant box. The only rifle in the party was carried by Salty Bill.

Bode Cushing and Tomichi had finished their work and the cinched and laden burros, ready for the trail, were wandering about in circles. Salty Bill, with freshly filled pipe, was already on Spot. Senor Oje had just finished a last few minutes of talk with the old scout freighter and cook and now it was time for the boys to say good-bye.

Senor Oje and Major Honeywell drew the party over to the big tent. Neither man was as jovial as Ned would have liked to see him.

"We've said all that need be said," began Senor Oje at last. "You boys know that your success depends on keeping cool and using your wits. Don't get excited and don't separate. As a little mark of my regard for your leader I want to make him a present."

As he said this he motioned the four boys into the tent where, on a cot, rested two new revolvers and three beautiful magazine rifles. Selecting one of the latter and a belt already filled with cartridges, the ranchman presented it to Ned. The boy became a little embarrassed.

"Take it," continued Senor Oje. "It is a good weapon and you may find it useful—if big game happens to cross your path."

"I accept it," exclaimed Ned with feeling, "for the boys as well as myself. My hope is that we'll never need it."

It was an ideal morning for the start. The breakfast mess stood neglected while John Rico, Dan Mears, Bode Cushing and the half-breed Tomichi, their picturesque and variegated costumes enlivening the picture, formed a group near the impatient burros. Salty Bill Donnelly, drawing at his bubbling pipe, drooped limply in his saddle. Salty Bill wore no gay colors; there was nothing of the scout of romance about him—not even long hair. Back of this group the golden brown heights of Ute Mountain towered a few miles away. To the south and just beyond began the ragged foot-hills of the further mountains, into which the little expedition was now about to enter by unmarked and unknown trails.

Ned sprang into the saddle, handling his new rifle awkwardly, but proud of it. The other boys did the same and Salty Bill straightened himself.

"Good-bye," exclaimed Ned once again, "and we thank you both for all you've done."

As his sure-footed pony turned and advanced to Salty Bill's side at the head of the train, the other boys by direction fell in behind. At the same moment Tomichi, the half-breed Jicarilla, sprang to the smouldering camp fire and caught

up two half burned bits of wood. Waving these in the soft morning air until they burst into flames, he ran to the head of the train and, pointing the blazing sticks toward the south, turned and with low obeisance waved the flaming fagots in front of Salty Bill and Ned. The boys looked on with wonder. Senor Oje laughed.

"It's the good luck sign," he explained. "By this fire we light you to safety and success."

"Hold it," came suddenly from the rear.

It was Bob Russell, high in his stirrups and with his ever ready camera focused on the group.

"All right," he cried, "I've got you—'the Napier Expedition leaving McElmo camp.'"

At exactly twenty-five minutes past six the bell on the lead burro fell into its steady, monotonous tinkle and the expedition set out toward Ute Mountain.

At noon Ned and his friends had pretty well skirted the foothills of old Ute and were already far enough and high enough in the rough ground to see beyond the sterile plain separating them from the reservation hills. The course bore south and a little west. Salty Bill calculated to hit the line dividing Utah and Colorado about where the party would enter the second range of hills. When a stop was made at twelve o'clock the boys expected only a light luncheon, but to their sur-

prise Salty Bill tethered the burros and prepared a hot meal.

"They's on'y a few rules about freightin' in the desert," explained the old plainsman. "Keep yer head cool, yer feet dry, don't git in a hurry and remember yer stummick."

An hour later the trail was resumed. At about two o'clock, the burros jogging along at a good speed on the down slope, Little McElmo Creek was reached. Here the animals were watered and then a direct course was laid for a gap in the hills five or six miles away. Somewhere between the creek and the hills the Ute reservation line was crossed and when, at four o'clock, the sand of the plains gave way to the rough ground of the hills—which could be seen rising beyond in benches to almost mountainous heights, Salty Bill estimated that twelve miles of rugged trail lay between them and Navajo land.

Cinches were newly tightened and the up-climb began at once. Salty Bill now rode a quarter of a mile in advance at times and Ned followed at the bridle of the bell burro. For a time progress was almost as rapid as the advance on the plains, and then the burros, recognizing hill work, fell into a stubborn, slow pace that showed that the hoped-for Navajo land and the boundary monument would not be reached that night. Nor

was progress always forward. As the hills grew more precipitous the plainsman on ahead doubled on the trail like a railroad winding up a grade and now and then the guide awaited the cavalcade, to head it onto a new slope.

But it was all most interesting. As the country became more mountainous, valleys began to break into the higher ground and now and then as these were crossed water was found in slender rivulets flowing eastward toward the San Juan. About six o'clock a halt was made in a wide canyon at the bottom of which trickled one of these small streams. Pine timber covered the lower slopes of the rocky defile and extended almost to the water. Next to the stream, where the soil had washed down from the hill, was a rich growth of grass in which bloomed wild verbenas and great ox-eyed daisies.

"Why not stop here tonight?" suggested Ned.

Salty Bill, without replying at once, began examining the location with his trained eye.

"I ain't seen a sign o' Ute today," he answered at last, "and I reckon the friends o' Blue Horse ain't over curious about us. But it ain't no use to tempt Injuns. I like open ground myself, when there's a bunch o' us. My own idee is we'd 'bout as well strike a trail up to the bench," and he pointed to a shoulder of the canyon on the

south which seemed to promise a flat, treeless level.

The boys had been giving little thought to danger, and this caution somewhat alarmed them. But Ned at once approved the suggestion, and Salty Bill, springing on his pony, said that he would ride on through the timber and, if possible, pick up a new trail on the far side of the canyon. When he had gone the boys made the most of the welcome pause. Nearly a half hour passed and night was beginning to arrive in the depths of the canyon. Bob Russell was hastening a series of snap shots in the last full light of the sun and the other boys were posing for him in various attitudes when, suddenly, the report of a rifle startled them.

The shot was not in the immediate vicinity. If it was Salty Bill shooting at some animal, thought the boys, he must have gone some distance.

"I suppose he means for us to come ahead," suggested Alan.

But Ned shook his head.

"We'd better get ready and wait," he said.

The boys mounted again and Ned took his place by the lead burro.

"Maybe he's lost and wants a signal," volunteered Bob at last.

"Salty Bill lost—here?" replied Ned, smiling. "Hardly."

As the shadows deepened and there was neither sight nor sound of their guide the boys' apprehension began at last to grow into nervousness. Another ten minutes passed with no sound in the gathering gloom but the soft gurgle of the little stream. The silent waiting had now brought to all the boys a dread belief that some accident had befallen their guide. Then suddenly the veteran plainsman slipped silently out of the nearby trees with a hand extended in a sign that every one read at a glance—"Silence."

Without a word Salty Bill almost slid to the lead burro and unbuckled its bell. Then, with hand raised again, he took the animal by the halter and started rapidly along the bank of the stream.

Not a question was asked and the old man volunteered no information. Avoiding fallen timber and underbrush the little train advanced quickly and silently through the shadows of the dense pines. After traversing perhaps a quarter of a mile Salty Bill turned sharply toward the creek. There, under the bank, stood his pony. Quickly remounting, the guide forded the stream, and then, in the open, urged the burros forward into a quick trot.

As the boys and their leader entered the pine timber on the far side of the creek the train fell

into a walk again, emerging at last near the north side of the canyon. Then every one recognized Salty Bill's object. They were on the back trail and making for the high ground from which they had recently descended.

"Going up?" whispered Ned at last, attempting to conceal his nervousness.

"Ef we kin," said Salty Bill in a low, sober voice. "But there's Utes ahead of us and, meb-be, behind us."

"But Blue Horse—" answered Ned quickly.

"Mebbe they was only jokin'," said Salty Bill. "But the Ute ye heerd shootin' made me hear bees. An' God pity Blue Horse when old man Oje hears about this."

CHAPTER VII

THE ATTACK OF THE UTES

With unerring frontier skill Salty Bill had instantly guided his charges back to the end of the canyon trail by which the party had made its way from the higher ground. Even the boys could now recognize the fresh hoof-marks of their animals in the more open soil where the larger timber gave way to pinon growth. Finally, as the trees broke into isolated clumps and the rocky path down which they had just traveled came once more into view, Salty Bill called a halt.

"We've got the rocks behind us now," he said, "and we'll wait here a spell. Ef this ain't a false alarm and anyone tries to make trouble in front we kin fall back on the trail, mebbe."

"Why not do it now?" asked Ned.

"Wal," slowly answered Salty Bill, "thet thar path ain't what ye'd call kivered. And ef thar's anyone around yar who wants to practice shootin' I reckon we'd make purty good marks lined up agin the rocks."

The red glow of the sun just reached the higher slopes of the canyon face and everyone instantly appreciated the wisdom of the old scout's ad-

vice. The trail itself could not be seen but the boys hoped that behind them at least was escape.

"And if we do have to go back," expostulated Ned, "what about going on, later?"

"Don't figger so fur ahead," answered Salty Bill. "Git out o' one trouble afore ye look fur more."

"Do you think there's much danger?" interposed Bob.

"Much danger?" repeated Salty Bill. "Son, there's always more or less danger when a feller's shootin' at ye. And the Ute who tried to git me didn't think I was no deer neither. That reminds me—" went on the veteran but he stopped short.

"Did you see that?" exclaimed Ned, half under his breath.

But the alert guide had seen all that the observant boy had. At that moment, a faint form moving among the distant pines, suddenly emerged a half naked mounted Indian. The pony of the savage dashed into the clearing, its owner swung a rifle with a yell of defiance and then whirled his animal again to cover. He reached it, but before the other boys knew what was happening Salty Bill's rifle had spoken from his hip. The guide did not even pause to aim the weapon. The challenge had been given and accepted.

"Blue Horse has just about the same as committed suicide," observed Salty Bill coldly. "Now, you boys git them burros and yerselves behind the rocks." As he spoke he indicated an almost semi-circle of rock fragments lying at the foot of the trail, a fallen bit of the canyon side. Salty Bill himself sat erect and unmoving on his pony.

"What about yourself?" asked Ned anxiously as the boys made haste to carry out instructions.

"I ain't crowded yit," came the answer. At the same moment Ned saw Salty Bill's hand tighten on his bridle rein. Six hundred yards away two Indians rode silently from the deeper woods. Pausing a moment they advanced a short distance into the sparse timber. As they did so Salty Bill rode forward. Again the Indians advanced. Salty Bill did the same. Whether this meant peace or danger Ned did not know; but he did know that it was two to one and—the burros and the other boys being now behind the rock barricade—Ned's sense of fairness got the better of his discretion. He swung himself onto his own pony and, very quietly, followed Salty Bill.

When the white man and his red opponents were within two hundred yards of each other there was a sharp stop. Then, with no word and no sign, Salty Bill, his rifle on his knees, slowly drew out, charged and lit his pipe. Was this another

play? Ned's lips were dry with nervous concern. It seemed so much like a picture; so much like a scene from a play that he wondered if men so calmly indifferent could really have murder in their hearts.

Something in the still oppressiveness of the situation seemed to hypnotize him. Then there was the feeling that he would soon awaken and find it all a dream.

Nor was this feeling changed when he became conscious that the two Indians were slowly and silently turning away. Finally he saw only the backs of the two savages and then—three shots rang out almost together. The treacherous Utes had whirled in their tracks and fired point blank at Salty Bill. But they did not catch that worthy unprepared. The lunging horse of one Indian and the prostrate figure of its rider as he wildly clasped the animal's mane showed that the scout's answering shot had not been wasted.

Twice again the rifle snapped, the red spurts of fire now showing plainly in the falling night. Salty Bill's pony sprang forward, veered to the right and sank to the ground. The scout's second shot had not gone true and his luckier enemy hurled himself forward on his scampering beast. A chorus of savage shouts arose from the timber. Salty Bill's rifle was at his feet. The dismounted

guide's revolver was already in his hand, but the last plunge of his pony jerked the bridle rein yet in Salty Bill's grasp and his revolver shot plowed up the stony ground.

The Ute's rifle was again at his shoulder, but the crack of Ned's gun sent a bullet into the man's chest. Salty Bill turned. With a quick motion Ned spurred his animal to the guide's side, and then, Salty Bill's hand grasping the saddle pommel, the pony galloped quickly back to the barricade. A half dozen shots followed in the wake of Ned and the rescued guide, but the only result was splinters of granite from the face of the rocks.

"Ye shouldn't 'a' done that, son," exclaimed Salty Bill, "withouten orders. But I'm obliged to ye jist the same."

Even as he spoke the plainsman's rifle was making it dangerous for a Ute to advance far into the open. But now it could be plainly seen that their enemies were many in number and certainly looking for trouble.

"Things always seem to happen after dark," exclaimed Bob Russell when it was seen that Salty Bill and Ned were unharmed, "just when I can't get a good snap shot. I'd like to git a snap at a real, fighting Indian."

Salty Bill looked at him curiously.

"That's right," he said, "I can't never seem to git 'em to perform jist like I'd like neither. I like 'em in daylight too."

But the hearts of the boys were not as light as their tongues. Salty Bill did what he could to assure them that so far they had the better of it.

"We're protected and they ain't," he explained, "and ef they hold off till it's dark we'll try to git onto the high ground. We may lose some baggage, but we ain't a goin' to lose no lives, I reckon. At the worst, I allow they'll be satisfied ef we turn our stock loose."

"Never," exclaimed Ned. "At least not as long as we've got a cartridge."

Salty Bill shrugged his shoulders. "I've done it with 'em many a time," he said slowly, "or I wouldn't 'a' been here now."

But the enemy apparently did not mean to wait for complete darkness. The eagle-eyed Salty Bill at that moment saw two more Utes crawling forward toward his dead pony, Spot, no doubt intent on recovering the pony's saddle and bridle. As he called Ned's attention to the Indians, the boy's rifle rose to his shoulder.

"Wait," cautioned the scout, "till they git closter. I'll give the word."

It isn't a pleasant thing to find yourself suddenly turned executioner of a human being, but

Ned's soul was full of bitterness. The possibility that these miscreants might block his long cherished plans; the recollection of how these Utes had cruelly murdered Old Buck; his sense of responsibility for those with him and, above all, his belief that every man has a right to protect his own life hardened his young heart. Perhaps it also steadied his eye.

"Take the one on the right," whispered Salty Bill. "Now!"

Almost together two shots sounded. The Indian on the left stumbled, rose and then ran quickly toward the timber. The one on the right sank to the ground like an empty meal bag.

Immediately the cries in the distant trees broke out with redoubled vigor.

"I don't suppose you notice no difference," exclaimed Salty Bill quickly, "but they're comin'. They ain't a goin' to wait fur dark. Now, boys, don't be skeered. Injun fightin' is half bluff and yellin'. Ef any o' ye git accidental wounded I kin take keer o' ye. An' it'll be all over in a few days. Just spread out thar and don't show yerselves exceptin' when ye shoot. Git your belts ready an' don't shoot to make a noise. Shoot to kill. An' wait till they're clost—them as has revolvers. Don't git skeered. Why," and the old campaigner laughed, "ye'll all be a'tellin' yer children

'bout this rumpus some day, and how not one o' ye had no panic."

Crude as Salty Bill's philosophy may have been it had its effect. Not a boy in the party but said to himself that he would be the last to show the white feather. The yells continued, louder. Salty Bill took another look at the ponies and burros. Instinctively, apparently, the animals had bunched themselves, and they stood in a close group behind the rocks. The boys themselves could scarcely be seen. Each one had selected a niche presenting a peep-hole of advantage. Ned took one end of the barricade and Salty Bill the other.

The attack was not to be delayed many moments. Salty Bill wondered whether it was yet dark enough to attempt a retreat. At the same time he glanced once again at the trail behind him. The old scout's heart sank—not through fear, but because he realized the danger in which his charges were placed. Far up the trail, the fading glow now making it just discernible, Salty Bill saw, dimly silhouetted against the rocks, the figure of a mounted Indian.

"They got us comin' an' goin'," said the old man to himself. "I guess they been awaitin' to block the trail."

Even as he looked, there was a single shot to

the far right of the barricade and then, almost with it, the crash of a concerted discharge and the sodden smack of lead on the rocks that told that the charge was on. There was no answer; the barricaded expedition was holding its fire. Again came a volley. Bob Russell dropped to the ground, but it was only a bullet through his hat. Then an irregular fusillade began.

Suddenly Salty Bill felt a hand on his sleeve. It was Ned's.

"Don't you think we'd better try the trail?" asked Ned in a whisper. "We're bound to be surrounded here. And they may block us in the rear."

Salty Bill shook his head.

"They've done that a'ready," he said, soberly but so that the other boys could not hear him. "The trail's blocked now."

Ned followed the old scout's gaze. Sure enough, there, hugging the clinging shelf on the canyon side, rode a lone Indian.

At that instant the crack of a revolver sounded in the barricade. Then another. Salty Bill and Ned impulsively sprang up and glanced quickly over the rocks. A dozen or more Utes could be seen crouching low and advancing rapidly.

"Not yet," cautioned Salty Bill. "They ain't clost enough. Take yer time. Kill one outside

and one when they git in an' we're all right. Steady, boys."

But Ned and the scout used their rifles and at least one Ute came no farther.

"Let 'em come right up," called out Salty Bill once more. "An' that's five dead Injuns. Steady, boys."

But the strain was too much for Alan, Bob and Elmer. One after another they fired in spite of themselves, to Salty Bill's disgust.

Even as the veteran freighter spoke his listening ear detected a sudden cessation, in part, of the spattering shots.

He was apprehensive of a final rush, and sprang to his outlook to see what it meant. The Ute fire was now only occasional, but there was no sign of immediate attack. Salty Bill was nonplussed. The valley below was black. The pine forest was in twilight gloom, but even in it Indians could be seen grouping themselves and then falling back. The scout was puzzled. It did not reassure him, for he took every act of the red man by contraries. He would have been glad, if the attack had to come, to have had it before night had wholly fallen. While he was striving in vain to solve the puzzle and to find some reason for the sudden cessation of hostilities, his arm was touched again.

"What do you make of that?" whispered Ned sharply.

He pointed to the trail above. The lone Indian was now far down the canyon side. But, on a pole, waving over his head, was a bit of white—the universal symbol of peace. The horseman was descending rapidly and the white cloth was plainly perceptible in the gloom.

"What do I make of it?" queried Salty Bill—then he turned again and looked over the barricade. The firing had wholly ceased. The plainsman's brow was wrinkled in thought. "I don't make nothin' of it but—say," and the old scout's face lit up with the thought. Another long glance at the hastening horseman on the trail and he turned to the boys.

"I guess ye kin put up your weepins," he exclaimed. "I reckon old Blue Horse has saved his bacon."

In the dead silence of another five minutes the barricaded expedition watched and waited. The oncoming horseman disappeared in the pinon growth at the foot of the trail and then Blue Horse, the despised Ute, rode into the barricade.

"How!" he exclaimed, his face as stolid as ever.

"How!" replied Salty Bill with as little expression as the Indian.

Then the scout jerked his thumb over the bar-

ricade toward the now silent and hidden attackers.

Blue Horse whirled his pony around the stone heap and advanced a few paces. Then the hollow air of the canyon resounded with a resonant Ute cry. Only echoes rolled up and down the ravine. Again the passive Blue Horse called. This time, with the echoes, came an answer. The Ute horseman, thrusting his heels into his pony's side, sprang forward into the gloom. When he had disappeared Salty Bill exclaimed:

“He made good, but it was by a scratch. Ye're as safe tonight, boys, as ef ye was in yer mother's bed at home. That Blue Horse is surely a wise guy.”

CHAPTER VIII

FORDING THE SAN JUAN

The loss of Salty Bill's pony seemed to the boys a serious matter. When Ned suggested alternating in the use of his animal the plainsman said:

"When Blue Horse hears what's happened, I'll hev a pony. Don't ye fret about that."

Salty Bill now announced that the night camp would be on the creek at the bottom of the canyon. Readjusting the bell on the head burro the nervy guide, whose assurance of present safety was contagious, took that animal's halter and once again set out through the timber. As the boys became confident that the enemy had withdrawn, relief took the place of concern and, when the open grass of the canyon bottom was finally entered, there was even a little joviality.

Salty Bill had located a camp site and Elmer and Bob started the fire while the rest of the party relieved the pack animals of their loads. The glow of the camp-fire turned the waxen green of the nearest pines into glints of gold; beyond was only blackness. Ebony walls marked the canyon sides.

"I suppose they can see our fire?" suggested Alan at last.

"See it?" grunted Salty Bill. "They ain't doin' a thing but settin' up thar some'er now a watchin' us. And right among 'em is Blue Horse a laying down the law. An' say, that Injun is in the biggest sweat o' his life right this minute. The least we'll get'll be a new pony."

"An' that reminds me," exclaimed Salty Bill as he came into the circle of light carrying a bucket of cool canyon water, "most o' you Eastern chaps is crazy about washin' yerselves. Ef you kids want a bath go and git it now afore ye eat. Then we'll have a batch o' pancakes, some fried ham and coffee and ef ye'r still hongry a bite o' cheese."

Ned slapped his leg. "I didn't really know what was the matter with me," he laughed. "I want a souze."

The four boys acted on Salty Bill's suggestion. They were in the midst of their frolic when the guide began pounding on a tin pan with a cook spoon and calling, "Chuck's ready!"

Half dressed, but with bodies aglow with health and vigor, the boys squatted on the soft grass and attacked the ham and pancakes.

"Right now," exclaimed Bob Russell, "I vote for cheese and the limit."

When, at last, the old freighter knocked the ashes from his pipe, Ned looked at his watch.

"Holy Smoke!" he exclaimed. "Eleven o'clock! Lights out, everybody, and turn in."

"An' don't you boys be pilin' out afore day," admonished Salty Bill as he extinguished the fire. "We've got plenty of time fur this job and we don't make no railroad connections in this country. Remember yer stummick, git yer natural sleep and don't hurry. Now turn in an' sleep yer heads off."

The sun was well in the sky before its rays reached into the cool depths of the canyon, and it was six o'clock before even Ned was astir. When he stuck his head out of the tent he could not restrain an exclamation of surprise. The smoke of the morning camp-fire was curling straight upward and Salty Bill was busy with kettle and pot. And just opposite, squatted on the grass, sat Blue Horse. Behind him, the reins on the ground, a beautiful spotted Indian pony nibbled at the rich herbage. Ned wakened the other boys and then threw back the curtain flap.

"Well, if that wouldn't freeze you!" exclaimed Bob Russell.

"And, say," laughed Alan, "if Salty Bill will come to Chicago and turn fortune teller he can have my trade."

But Elmer shook his head. "If dat Injun is waitin' fo' breakfas', you needn't 'spect me to he'p cook it. I ain't no use fo' no horse-thieves—and worse."

"There's the pony all right," explained Salty Bill when the boys appeared, "and Blue Horse says he's goin' to take us through the reservation. I reckon we'll have to give him a clean bill, eh?"

The Indian was given food and drink, which he accepted with dignity and without comment. While camp was being struck Blue Horse walked slowly into the pine timber, but he returned in a few moments on his own pony. In the Ute tongue the guide explained the destination of the party—the boundary monument—and with only a grunt of acknowledgment Blue Horse plunged into the stream, entered the timber and in a few moments was leading the expedition up the south slope of the canyon.

This day's progress was rapid. When the hot southern sun was just overhead, the party reached the highest point of the day's climb. For an hour the train had been working up the side of a precipitous rise by way of a sharp, shelving trail in more than one part of which a misstep would have meant death.

Ned and Salty Bill held council with Blue Horse. The elevated plain or plateau on which

they now paused extended into yet higher and rougher ground to the south. Where this ground broke into almost mountainous formation a defile or valley gave a glimpse of still higher peaks in the misty blue distance.

"One o' them," explained Salty Bill, "is yer Mount Wilson whar ye was on yer other trip."

To the right and west the plateau shelved rapidly downward. Its rugged slopes were spotted here and there with timber and at its base a yellow expanse indicated the desert. In this, however, a brown line could be traced.

"And down thar," continued Salty Bill, "is the San Juan. Ye can't git nowhar till ye cross that."

Further consultation with the Indian revealed that the state boundary monument, that was to mark the starting point into the Tunit Cha wilderness, was on the north slope of the low range just ahead. If they advanced to that point they would find the trail beyond rougher and more difficult. If they made a descent into the desert of the San Juan they would be somewhat off the projected advance, but as more speed was possible by this course it was chosen. Ned calculated that in doing this they would pass out of Colorado, where they then were, into Utah and thence into Arizona where the San Juan river cut

the line about four miles west of the Colorado and Utah line.

But the decision did not suit Bob Russell.

"I had it all planned," exclaimed the young reporter. "I was going to get a snap-shot of that boundary mark and now my Sunday special article is spoiled. Why, think of it! If I sat down on that spot I might be in Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico all at once."

"I'm sorry," laughed Ned, "but I read of one newspaper man who starved and died in the wilderness because he went out of his way to find picturesque trouble. We'll miss all that we can."

"You're right, of course," answered the smiling Bob. "But I wish something would happen. It's pretty dull—"

Salty Bill grunted. Leaning lazily on his saddle and drawing slowly on his pipe, the old scout fixed his gaze on Bob.

"Son," he exclaimed with a drawl, "that reminds me o' somepin'. Onct when I was freightin' down Tucson way they was a tall man in a white shirt who dropped off thar and told us at the eatin' house that he was a writin' man. He said he was a lookin' fur 'bad men' and 'color,' whatever that meant. But they warn't no bad men on exhibition and the stranger fin'ly allowed it was the dullest town he ever see. I kind o' felt

sorry fur him and jist to cheer him up I took him to a fonda run by a greaser, fur a game o' cards. But the stakes was low and it was so quiet that the stranger was a yawnin'. He was willin' to make the stakes higher but we was poor men, because it was only me and two other freighters named Hank Kruise and another feller, we called 'Jimmy' because he was a greaser named Ximenez. It was that dull the flies wa'nt even buzzin'. Finally they was a pot so small that the writin' man throwed down his hand and quit. And I stayed out 'cause it was Hank's deal an' I mostly stayed out then, but without no remarks. Well, sir, when Hank and Jimmy showed their hands I see five aces between 'em. Ye couldn't see much more for the smoke. Jimmy he lived an hour, but Hank never moved 'till we laid him out. I never see the stranger agin, but I was reli'bly informed he went right over to the deepo and set thar till the train kem along."

Bob looked at Salty Bill and then at the boys and laughed.

"You mustn't take me too seriously, Salty Bill," he said, as the old guide resumed his pipe. "But I deserved it."

It was just noon. As there was neither wood nor water on the plateau, the decision was to alter the course, descend at once to the plain below and

push on to the bank of the San Juan. A little after two o'clock Ned, Salty Bill and Blue Horse, hastening ahead, reached the river. The stream itself was not large, but its canyon-like sides alarmed Ned. With hardly a foothold for man or beast, the sheer sides of the deep-cut water course sank in two or three benches to the brown current a hundred feet or more below the level of the desert. The boy said nothing, but Salty Bill understood his look.

"O, we'll git over, some way. There's usually a trail—somewhar."

He appealed to Blue Horse. But the Indian shook his head.

"Then," went on Salty Bill, "we'll have dinner and the burros kin look at the water whilst Blue Horse and me reconnoitres fur a crossin'."

In a short time the two men set out on their mission. It was hot on the sandy brink of the canyon and the animals were restless and thirsty, but after several attempts the boys gave up trying to reach the water below. They were glad enough when, about four o'clock, they heard a shot far to the east and, with the binoculars, made out Salty Bill signaling them to advance. Blue Horse, who had gone west, had not returned, but there was no need to wait for him. He would understand and follow.

The crossing found by the guide brought the expedition back almost to the state line and, as Ned calculated, within a mile of the much discussed boundary monument. Just here, the desert disappeared in a broken range of cliffs and peaks, through which the San Juan cut a still deeper course. But the now rocky nature of one side of the canyon presented footholds, while the opposite bank seemed to promise a difficult but possible ascent.

Salty Bill's judgment was right. A trail leading to the bottom of the canyon was found, and then, much to the guide's chagrin, it was discovered that the stream had a depth of about four feet. There was no use in wasting time in regrets. Each pack would have to be unloaded and carried over by man. This task was begun at once. One by one the ponies were led slowly down the trail, slipping and sliding, and then, after a drink in the stream, turned loose on the opposite shore. All the boys stripped and tied their clothes in bundles, and Alan and Bob preceded the animals and were ready to recover each beast as it made its way to the top of the other canyon side. When the burros were all safely tethered on the far bank every one tackled the outfit baggage.

The transfer of one of the hydrogen drums

took two of the boys something like a quarter of an hour of laborious work. But time passed rapidly and Blue Horse had rejoined the party long before the portage was complete. The Indian did not volunteer to assist. For a time he stood stolidly by his pony's side and then, the work nearing completion, he descended to the water's edge. His pony he left on the cliff above.

At this moment Alan and Elmer were slowly descending the precarious trail with the last hydrogen cylinder. They had almost reached the water's edge when Elmer slipped and the valve end of the two hundred pound steel drum fell from his hands. The sharp crash of the valve head on the rocks was followed by a reverberating explosion. A cloud of dust and gravel filled the air. The valve had been wrenched or broken and six thousand feet of hydrogen gas under three thousand pounds pressure to the square inch were pouring from the cylinder with cannon-like explosions.

The deflected blast struck the naked colored boy on the back and he was thrown forward by the blow. Unable to recover himself, Elmer fell, striking his head against the side of the canyon and then the dazed boy, before Alan could grasp him, rolled over and with two sickening bounds dropped from the narrow trail into the water.

The roaring cylinder, its released gas almost boring a cavity into the solid rock, rolled slowly downward. Alan made one desperate effort to stop it, but the shower of gas and dust blinded him and, gathering speed, the drum slipped from the trail and hurled itself directly at the form of Blue Horse. Before the latter could spring aside the cylinder struck the Indian on the arm and then, with a seemingly redoubled roar, plunged into the water just over the spot where the body of Elmer had disappeared.

Instantly a geyser of foam flung itself into the air. The free gas, tearing through the water, created a whirlpool of foam and spray. The explosion of a submarine mine could not have lashed the water into more violent commotion.

Alan, his face blanched with the knowledge that in that foaming, bubbling eddy poor Elmer was lying unconscious, sprang wildly forward. But a dark form at the water's side was quicker. Without even waiting to recover an erect position the taciturn Blue Horse slid into the water like a snake. And before even Alan could reach the edge of the now swirling torrent the Indian, with the unconscious Elmer in his sinewy arms, was slowly fording the stream to the further bank.

CHAPTER IX

A TRAIL BY COMPASS

Ned and Salty Bill sprang to the rescue. They and the Indian soon had the unconscious boy on the cliff. The time the lad was in the water had been so brief that resuscitation was almost immediate. Then some one thought of the Indian.

Blue Horse was gone.

Salty Bill summed it up in a sentence: "This is Navajo land and I reckon he thinks his work is done."

Without even accepting food the proud savage had disappeared. Elmer's regret was keenest.

"He certainly was on the square with us," said Ned.

Salty Bill grunted. "On the square?" he repeated. "Mebbe. But that reminds me—" supper was over and they were lying about the glowing fire and Salty Bill's pipe was going. "Onct, 'tain't no matter when, but 'twas afore any o' you boys was borned, I was prospectin' down in the White Mountains o' Arizony. We had a fall o' snow that laid us up fur six weeks. When I couldn't stand it no longer, I figgered out a pair

o' snow shoes and set out fer some recreation down to Globe. An' I reckon I'd a got thar ef I hadn't stopped in the valley to hev a peek into the meanest lookin' hogan ye ever see. An' talk o' yer misery—inside was a woman and a baby froze to death an' a 'Pache Injun dyin' o' cold and no food. As I didn't really hev nothin' in particular to do I rigged up a sled out o' the sides o' the shack and hauled that Injun seven miles up the mountain to the cabin. And he et hisself back into the gratefulest redskin you ever see."

The old freighter recharged his pipe slowly, replenished the fire and continued.

"I was thinkin' about a Injun bein' on the square. This 'ere same 'Pache hung around our cabin, huntin' fur us and totin' wood, all winter. In the spring my pardner got tired and quit. And havin' nothing else to do I come down with a fever. I reckon they was two weeks I was locoed fur sure. Leastways that 'Pache nussed me night and day till I could eat agin and then he fed me another week till I allowed I'd try and git up the next mornin'. He was that overjoyed you couldn't tell it. But they wasn't no chuck pan a beatin' fer me the next mornin'. My nuss jist kind o' resigned while I was asleep that night. I didn't mind the dust and nuggets and

camp truck he took with him, but I was sure sore about my shirt and pants. And he was as square a Injun as I ever knowed."

The next morning, October 5, found every one refreshed and astir early. While breakfast was sizzling Ned outlined again his immediate plans. Pointing across the canyon of the San Juan to the hills beyond he said:

"If we were on the north side of that south range we should be at the juncture of the four states and territories. Then, if we imagined an immense parallelogram 17.7 miles wide—east and west—and 34.5 miles long—north and south—with its northeast corner touching the point at which we stood, the southwest corner would mark the location of the mesa."

By this he meant latitude $36^{\circ} 44' 25''$ north and longitude $109^{\circ} 7' 30''$ west.

"My suggestion is this," continued Ned: "It is impossible for us to measure our advance exactly and we should not know when we had reached 17.7 miles west. I recommend a compass course straight through the mountains to the southwest. We are now a little southeast of the boundary monument. When we start we will move west until we are in a north and south line and estimate our distance from the monument at one mile. That simply shortens our north and south

distance to 33.5 miles. Using that line as a base we will lay our course along the longest hypotenuse of our base line, 43 miles—”

Salty Bill whistled and turned to his frying bacon.

“Go ahead,” he laughed. “Don’t ye mind me. But don’t fergit; this hypota-what-you-call-’em has got to hit water now and then.”

“That’s where the navigator gives way to the steward,” said Ned, laughing in turn. “But anyway we’ll go ahead on that line.”

Following the brink of the river west, advance was made until the compass showed that the party was just south of the boundary mark north of the canyon. Then a short halt was made.

“The course by compass,” explained Ned, “as I have already laid it out on paper will be southwest by west one-half. This means that a straight advance a little over five compass degrees west of the southwest line will in time hit the mesa.”

He had adjusted the compass on the ground until the needle stopped on the north and south line. Then, on the compass face, he laid a straight bit of cardboard until its edge marked SW by W $1\frac{1}{2}$. Carefully sighting along the line of the card he fixed the furthest characteristic point on the horizon—a saddle-like cliff in the distant mountains.

"You see it?" he exclaimed. "Now, ho for the Tunit Chas and the old *Cibola*!"

It was a few minutes before seven o'clock. Through those trackless interwoven valleys and over those untrodden heights a path must be found.

When Ned and Salty Bill had advanced somewhat ahead of the rest of the party Ned said to his companion:

"Do you suppose we'll have any trouble with the Navajos?"

Salty Bill answered in his own way.

"When I went up to Denver onct to a cattle convention no one didn't tell me to look out fur pickpockets. So I mixed up with the crowds careless and free—and didn't lose nothin'. But I knowed a cowpuncher 'at was advised, and he kept his eyes peeled and the first time he forgot hisself they cleaned him out slicker 'an a bean pot at Sunday breakfast."

Ned's plans worked perfectly. Late on the afternoon of the second day, much to the astonishment of all, the boys recognized—as they reached the summit of the second range—the crystal lake and the blasted pine tree marking the site of Camp Eagle, where Bob and Elmer had waited in vain for the return of Ned and Alan on the first trip.

The satisfaction of good water and a convenient camp site was nothing compared with the boys' happiness in finding the old stores cached here. These included two tins of gasoline, the old tent, and a number of cooking utensils. The gasoline was a welcome addition to their supply and was easily carried in place of the lost cylinder of gas. The other articles were not needed.

One thing was apparent—Senor Oje would not see them on the fourth day.

On the next day they traversed the broken land of mesa and desert. Hour after hour the expedition was urged forward and at dark camp was made in a broken land of rock, sand and hills that stretched monotonously in all directions. In this region Ned and Alan had once wandered three days.

The treasure mesa was not yet in sight and this stop marked the close of the fifth day's travel. But Ned was confident. Circling the high ground before them, early the next morning, the travelers found themselves in a barren valley curving toward the south and bordered east and west by cliff-like hills. This freak of nature in the mountain wilderness was three miles wide. The onward march was laid straight down the center of it.

Ned, riding ahead with the binoculars almost

constantly to his eyes, examined every cut, canyon and defile on each side. At about nine o'clock, while he was thus engaged—and they had now been on the desert trail two hours and a half—Salty Bill suddenly spurred his pony forward. Ned saw the guide riding toward an oblong black object lying on the white sand. He guessed what it was before he reached it. Nevertheless, he was not a little surprised to discover one of the cast iron boxes which had been used on the *Cibola* to hold the liquid hydrogen bulbs and which had subsequently been thrown from the car as ballast.

When the rest of the party came up Ned and the guide were curiously examining the discarded box. Bob Russell, springing from his pony, ran forward for his inevitable snapshot.

"I guess that ought to help some!" exclaimed Bob. "You were certainly flying around here."

"We dropped them all over the mountains," said Alan.

"But you only dropped this one here," answered Bob in some excitement. "Can't you remember when you let this one go?"

Ned shook his head. "They were all alike," he answered, "and besides—" Suddenly he shut the binoculars with a bang. "Look here, Alan,"

he exclaimed, "every one of those boxes had a number—"

Bob turned the iron shell over with his foot. There, sure enough, was a number, a small stenciled "6" in white paint. All looked at Ned inquiringly.

"When we loaded those casks on the car," he said, thinking as he spoke, "we took them in order because they were in the big case in order. I'm sure we distributed 1, 2, 3 and 4 down one side of the car and 5, 6, 7 and 8 along the other." He thought a moment. "When we reconverted the liquid hydrogen back into gas we cut loose the boxes as we needed ballast. I'm certain we began with No. 1. And then, to balance the car, we took No. 4. Anyway, I seem to remember going back then to the one next to the first one. If we did, that was No. 2. And 3 followed. What end did we begin on on the other side?" he exclaimed, suddenly turning to Alan.

But Alan shook his head.

Bob interposed.

"I don't see that it makes much difference," he exclaimed. "In any event 6 and 7 must have been the last ones dropped. Now," he shouted heartily, "when did the *Cibola* drop these?"

"We didn't go by numbers," almost sighed Ned, "but the last box we threw overboard—"

Then he stopped and took a little note book from his pocket.

"You don't need to look," interrupted Alan fervently. "It was the evening we landed on the mesa, August 15."

"And in what direction were you sailing?" persisted the young reporter, like a detective.

"Here it is," exclaimed Ned, "'Aug. 15. At 6:30 P. M. traveling almost due east. Dropped last tank—'"

"Now," shouted Bob, turning toward the east and pointing in that direction, "how long before you came down?"

"My record doesn't show," replied Ned. "But not more than twenty minutes."

Bob threw himself on his pony and set off on a gallop across the sand toward the eastern cliffs.

"Follow me," he shouted over his shoulder, "if you want your mesa."

Ten minutes later the volunteer guide turned in much excitement. An abrupt sandstone pile blocked their way a half a mile ahead.

"Is that it?" shouted the reporter.

Ned and Alan shook their heads.

Bob reined in his pony disconsolately.

"Now," shouted Ned in turn, "follow me." He set off at a smart canter toward a defile to the south of the rise.

Salty Bill advanced slowly, far in the rear. But the four boys fell into a race for the opening. Elmer's "calico" won easily. As the other boys, their animals panting, reached his side, the colored boy was standing with fixed eyes looking far across a second and parallel valley.

Cutting into the edge of the picture and about a mile ahead was a towering pile of barren, golden brown rock. The end of it in view, like the prow of a ship, rose abruptly from the waveless sea of sand and pointed south.

"Dar's somepin'," exclaimed Elmer.

There was no need for verbal confirmation. The cheers of Ned and Alan and the swing of their hats to Salty Bill in the rear as they dashed forward through the little pass, told plainly enough that the Treasure Mesa had been found again.

CHAPTER X

SCALING THE MESA

At fifteen minutes after eleven o'clock on the morning of October 8, Ned Napier and his friends reached the end of their difficult and dangerous journey. As they approached the foot of the sterile, sun-baked cliffs of the uncharted mesa, the young leader pointed out the mouth of the tunnel, one hundred feet above the plain, through which he and Alan had escaped with their treasure from the heights above.

The original plan had been to carry the treasure, the Indian remains and the members of the expedition back to the camp near the McElmo Canyon on the reinflated *Cibola*. But on the march through the mountains this had been reconsidered. With a practically known trail behind, a trusted guide in the person of Salty Bill Donnelly, and twelve stout little burros at their disposal, Ned and Alan had come to a new conclusion.

The burros could not be abandoned in the mountain desert. Since they must be returned to the starting point in Colorado Ned had determined—should the *Cibola* be found uninjured—

to remove the wrought gold and silver and pottery by means of the burros. To assist in transferring the valuable cargo over the canyon of the San Juan River, Bob Russell and Elmer Grissom were to accompany Salty Bill.

Provisions had been provided for four persons for ten days. The five adventurers had now been on the trail six days and a half. But, by economy, only half the stores had been used. That the remaining half might get the return expedition back in comfort and give Ned and Alan food for at least two days on the mesa, meant a still more reduced ration. And it also meant that no time was to be lost.

"Salty Bill," ordered Ned at once, "you had better make an investigation of the timber to the east in search of the upper part of the creek we crossed last night. Elmer will return and secure the cast iron box we passed three miles back. It's the only thing I can think of to use in carrying water."

The packs were hastily unloaded, a quick luncheon was eaten and Salty Bill and Elmer rode off in opposite directions as ordered.

"Now," said Ned, "we three will see how long it's going to take us to climb three hundred feet of straight wall without a ladder."

First a quick inventory was made of all packs.

It was hot, perspiring work, but eagerness to be on the towering perpendicular cliff before night was sufficient incentive. One of the packs contained three stout Italian hemp inch ropes, two of them over three hundred feet long and one about fifty feet in length. These were laid out in loose coils. Then Ned produced two four-inch double pulley blocks. The long ropes were for the control of the captive balloon and the pulleys were for use, both on the ground below and in the mesa above, in controlling the balloon.

About fifty feet from the face of the mesa, under Ned's direction, several heavy fragments of sandstone were piled for an anchorage, and to these, with a section of the fifty-foot rope, one of the pulleys was attached. Through this pulley one of the three-hundred-foot ropes was then threaded.

Ned was to make the ascent to the top of the mesa carrying the extra rope and pulley and, after he had made a landing, he was to fasten the second pulley in the same way to a similar anchorage above.

"In that way," he explained, "by retaining the second rope above, whatever the direction of the wind, I can draw the balloon over the mesa and control it while I unload its freight."

But, for the first ascent, it would be necessary

to wait for a favorable wind. There was no doubt about their ability to send the balloon up, but there was no way to make it float over the cliff from below. And there was no way for the aeronaut to control it. Therefore, when the small balloon bag had been unpacked and laid out, its light net put in place and the two ropes made fast to the wooden ring in which the net drops ended, the boys made themselves busy arranging the rest of the equipment in suitable parcels to be lifted to the top of the mesa. It was now planned to attempt all of this by the balloon rather than by way of the secret tunnel.

About two o'clock Elmer returned with the iron box. But Salty Bill was an hour later. However, he had not only found water—almost two and a half miles east of the mesa—but he had trailed and shot a deer, the saddle and hindquarters of which he had behind him on the pony. He also carried a pack of faggots and a bundle of green pine sticks.

"I reckon that venison ain't goin' to do us much good dis hot weather," began Elmer.

"Finest kind o' weather fur jerked meat," answered Salty Bill, "and bein' kind o' short o' chuck I didn't overlook no chances."

The boys were anxious to start a water caravan, but the old cook reminded them of his precept:

“Take yer time, boys, don’t hurry, and remember yer stummicks. I’m goin’ to start this meat a curin’ afore anything else takes place.”

He hastily skinned the carcass and then put all the boys at work cutting the fresh meat into narrow strips about six inches long and an inch thick. As each piece was cut it was thoroughly salted and laid on the rocks in the sun. At the same time Salty Bill utilized his green pine branches in the construction of a rack about three feet high, the same in width and four or five feet long. Across this he laid a grill of sticks a few inches apart and then, beneath, started a slow, smouldering fire. On the grill the salted venison was laid, as if for broiling, just above the pungent smoke.

“And now,” explained the old plainsman, “ef kyotes or some other varmints don’t git it, about tomorrow mornin’ we’re agoin’ to have enough good meat to help us out quite a bit.”

Meanwhile, Ned had figured out the matter of the care of the burros and the procuring of water for the expedition. While the boys waited for a favorable breeze in which to send up the balloon, Salty Bill was to take all the stock to the timber and water, carrying with him the big oblong iron water-tight box and all the canteens. After watering the animals he was to rope them in the

grass and then return with the full canteens and the box, which, with a cloth over its top to prevent loss by splashing, was to be cinched on a burro.

Lighting his pipe afresh the guide lined up the animals and set out. Then came a wait. By five o'clock the reflected heat of the rocky wall became almost unbearable. The air seemed stagnant. Suddenly Ned was conscious that the lack of motion presaged a storm.

"I'm sure," he exclaimed, "that we're going to have wind tonight—perhaps too much of it. And it may come soon. Why not get ready?"

The young adventurers fell at once to the new task. One gas cylinder was rolled to the mouth of the flat bag and Ned got out a ten-foot length of inch rubber hose. A coupling and thread on one end of this fitted the coupling on the cylinder valve and the other end was introduced into the small tube-like extension of the balloon bottom. The loose folds of the bag opening were then bound tightly around the end of the hose with stout cord, and with a key the cylinder valve was slightly and slowly opened. Small as the opening was the pent-up gas rushed into the hose, which, with a hiss of steam, wobbled and curved like a wounded snake.

Then Ned attached the seat. The basket, being

too cumbersome for transportation, had been detached, and in its place a sort of "bo's'n's" chair was made fast about eight feet below the net drop ring. To this the young leader tied the three hundred feet of coiled up rope and the pulley he was to use on the mesa, and then he drew the lower control rope taut through the ground pulley and gave it in charge of Bob and Alan.

As the shapely and glistening yellow bag began to round out Bob exclaimed:

"Looks as if you ought to have a pair of tights and a trapeze, Ned."

But Ned was thinking of other things.

"If I get up all right," he said, "and there happens to be a storm, we've got to keep right at it. And if we don't get through by dark, why, we'll do the best we can in the dark. When you pay out the rope stop as soon as I wave my hat. That means I'm just above the top. Hold me steady then and one of you push the guide rope as near to the face of the cliff as you can. I'll be waiting for a gust of wind to carry me over the top of the mesa."

"How shall we know when you're off?" asked Bob.

Ned laughed. "If you don't keep a tight line on that pulley block you'll know by the rope pulling out of your hands," he explained. "I'll have

to jump. And when I do that the bag will spring up like a bird. You've got to hang on till you hear a shot. Then haul away, make fast down here, put on your first load—never more than two hundred pounds—and pay out. Calculate three hundred feet and stop. Then I'll haul in through my pulley, make fast in turn, unload, and give you the signal again."

The cylinder was being rapidly exhausted.

"And how about us?" inquired Bob anxiously. "You can't beat me out of seeing that Temple. And, say, do you fellows think you got everything up there? I'd give a good deal to find some buried treasure myself."

"You can look," laughed Alan. "But you won't be so keen when you get into about three feet of dust on that khiva floor. You never saw anything like it."

"Dust!" exclaimed Bob. "I'm going to sift every ounce of it."

Both boys laughed. The recollection of their own trying experience was still vivid.

"Well," said Ned, "you can't let each other up the cliff, but I'll fix it for you. When the last of the outfit has been sent up you can send up Elmer—"

"Me?" exclaimed the colored boy fearfully. "On dat trapeze?"

"Well, then, let Bob come," suggested Ned. "He's always looking for something new—"

"You bet I am!" exclaimed the reporter. "Let me go. It'll give me a chance at a fine snap-shot of the mesa top."

"If it isn't after dark and in a thunderstorm," interrupted Ned.

"And it will be," replied Bob. "It always is. Everything is always after dark."

"Not more than one of you four can come, though," went on Ned. "Then the others must make fast down here. Whoever comes must bring the rope ladder. Then I'll take the ladder to the tunnel mouth and let it down. But don't come up until I lower the hoisting rope we left in the tunnel. When that comes down, if it is dark, to avoid risks I want each one as he climbs up the ladder to tie this rope under his arms. And as he ascends the two of us in the tunnel will keep it tight. If there's a slip in the dark the fellow climbing can't fall far."

Meanwhile, as the breeze still held off, Ned suggested a cold supper. Instead, the enterprising Elmer unpacked the mess kit, and fried some of the yet unsmoked venison which, with a pot of tea and the last of Salty Bill's breakfast biscuits, made a hot and satisfying meal. In the midst of it Salty Bill returned with the water. At

sight of the balloon and the hissing cylinder, which was now nearly exhausted, the veteran's eyes bulged.

"And air you agoin' up in that little contraption?" he began.

"I am," replied Ned, springing forward. "And right now. Get ready, boys."

The smoke of the smouldering fire had suddenly puffed into his face. A faint breeze had wafted out of the west. The inflated bag had for some time been tugging at the control rope and the cylinder was empty.

"She'll be here by the time I'm up there," exclaimed Ned, jumping on the light board and grasping the supporting ropes. "Good-bye for a minute, and—"

Another gust swayed the orange-like bag.

"Pay out!"

Holding their breath Bob and Alan loosened the control rope and the balloon rose slowly. Again a light puff struck the bag and it swayed toward the ragged cliff.

"Faster," called Ned, dropping easily into the seat and leaning downward. "Don't let her hit the rocks. Pay out."

In the excitement both Elmer and Salty Bill sprang to the rope as if fearful that the bag might escape.

“Pay out—faster,” called Ned again. “Don’t hold back.”

And then, Alan taking charge, the rope began to run through the pulley and the balloon shot quickly skyward. In a few seconds a hat was waved high up on the little swinging seat, and Alan took a quick hitch of the loose rope around the taut end. The bag could be seen swaying gently back and forth from the effect of its stopping, but it was far from the edge of the cliff. Putting Bob and Elmer in charge of the hitch and Salty Bill at the loose end of the line Alan now began, hand over hand, to draw the taut rope toward the cliff. The bag above responded.

When Alan was finally backed up against the precipice the swinging seat above was nearly out of sight. At times the bag too almost disappeared as the breeze caught it. Thus, nearly ten minutes passed. The sky had darkened and a light rain had begun to fall. Still there was no signal from above. Those at the pulley anchorage watched anxiously. Suddenly the bag was seen to dart swiftly toward the mesa.

“There she goes,” yelled Bob excitedly.

But even as he spoke Alan flew several feet in the air, the line shot from his hand, the control rope tightened on the pulley with a snap and the bag above sprang out into view.

"He's dropped off," shouted Elmer as the empty seat could be seen swinging lazily below the car.

"You bet he did," exclaimed Alan. "And I felt his one hundred and fifty pounds all right."

CHAPTER XI

AN AERONAUT IN SPITE OF HIMSELF

Before Ned's first signal to "haul down" was heard the gathering storm had burst. The tent had been hastily erected as a shelter for the mess and provision kits, the extra clothing, sleeping rolls and damageable freight. But the gas cylinders, oil tins, tool and material boxes and waterproof packs were sent skyward one after another.

The willing workers were drenched, but they found joy in this part of their labors, and the *Cibola, Jr.*, rose and fell as regularly as a freight elevator.

But, in spite of all their activity, the work was slow. Not less than ten minutes were required for attaching, raising and landing each load and even before the gas cylinders were on the mesa top it was eight o'clock, wholly dark, and the rain was falling steadily.

When the balloon came down again after the tenth cylinder had been carried up the boys found, attached to the seat, a crumpled note, tied in Ned's handkerchief. It read:

"Send up everything tonight. May lose gas. Alan last with ladder. Others come by tunnel."

The boys knew that Bob, Elmer and Salty Bill were enough to do the work below, and, as Alan explained, this plan would permit him to enter the tunnel and drop the ladder while the work of transfer was being finished.

Therefore Alan got himself a candle and, after piling the new rope ladder on the seat beside him, disappeared upward in the dark. When Alan felt the jerk of the guide rope he knew that he was at the end of the three-hundred-foot length. He felt the instant lateral pull and the creak of Ned's pulley, and a few moments later he was safe by his chum's side.

Alan was dispatched at once to descend into the tunnel and make fast the ladder. Advancing cautiously, for he remembered that there was no mark on the mesa surface to indicate the yawning split in the rock, Alan reached the opening and then slowly made his way along its edge to the east where the steps began.

Without a light Alan finally, with great labor, reached the bottom—one hundred and eighty steps and two hundred feet below. As he felt his way blindly to the opening into the tunnel the cold draft struck him. In the tunnel he would be protected from the storm, but even there the use of the candle was impossible. So, dragging the ladder bundle behind him and crouching, he

again started forward. But he had gone only a few yards when a chill swept over him—for a soft, living thing had slid out from beneath his foot! As he sprang back he heard the shrill alarm of a rattlesnake.

Alan was not naturally timorous; but neither was he foolhardy. To go forward in the dark over this aroused and deadly serpent was worse than foolish. He did the wise thing—abandoned the ladder bundle at once and made his way back to the top of the mesa. Ned instantly approved his action, and agreed that this plan had better be given up.

It was now a few minutes after ten o'clock. Everything had arrived on the mesa but the tent and sleeping rolls, and the balloon was just about to be released for the next of the few remaining trips.

Ned hastily wrote and tied to the seat another note:

“No ladder tonight. Those who want dry beds and hot supper come up by balloon.”

Within another half hour three more trips had been made. On the last one Ned discovered a note in Bob's handwriting: “Thirty on dead freight.”

“What's that mean?” exclaimed Alan. “Thirty what?”

"Newspaper shop slang," laughed Ned. "That means 'all' or 'the end'."

The next load came slowly. When the balloon was pulled in both boys burst out laughing. Salty Bill, his eyes shut tight and his arms gripped around both seat ropes, was the human freight.

"What does that remind you of, Salty Bill?" roared Alan as the boys dragged him from his seat.

Salty Bill gasped. "It reminds me o' freightin' dynamite," he answered slowly.

Elmer was next; but the colored boy stood the trip better.

Bob's ascent was really the only dangerous one. He could let himself up a hundred and fifty feet by paying out the control rope from his seat in the balloon. But, when he reached that height, he would have to release the rope. The bag would then bound suddenly upward. Its flight would have to be checked by the rope held by those on the mesa. To reduce the shock that would follow the release below, those above slipped the second control rope from the pulley, and all advanced to the edge of the mesa with a tight grip on the line.

"He'll hold the end of his rope a moment before he lets go," suggested Ned. "When we feel

the bag pause, we'll all run back to keep the line taut. If we run as fast as the balloon ascends we'll pull it over the edge without a strain. If we don't, and it gets a loose rope, it'll shoot up like a rocket. And Bob will get a jolt when he takes up our slack."

But there was several moments' delay before those waiting above felt the balloon beginning to rise once more. When it did, it came slowly and evenly and without a pause. The bag was ascending so smoothly that Ned became alarmed.

"I hope we haven't lost our gas," he exclaimed apprehensively. "She's coming up like a water-logged ship."

There were now signs of an abatement in the storm and a few stars were shining, but in the excitement not even Salty Bill observed these signs. The bag was coming so regularly and slowly that Ned began to pull on the hanging rope to accelerate the rise.

"The balloon must be leaking," he exclaimed suddenly. "Haul away and pull it up."

The just buoyant car responded, reached the height of the mesa top and was drawn in without a jar or strain. As the swinging seat drifted easily to a safe landing and the control rope was made fast, Ned and Alan sprang forward and grasped the gently swaying passenger.

The resourceful Bob, his form crouched low in the seat, held in his clasped arms a heap of jagged stones. Beneath the seat, made fast by the end of the control rope, swung a rock, certainly not less than one hundred pounds in weight. The reporter had loaded himself up with ballast, and the big rock, the fragments in Bob's lap and his own one hundred and eighty pounds had been so well calculated that the balloon had just been able to rise slowly.

"Well, what do you think of that?" exclaimed Ned.

"I think," answered Bob, rolling the rocks out of his lap as he leaped to the ground, "that I'll write a story about it some day, entitled 'An Aeronaut in Spite of Himself.' "

The little balloon was made fast and then, each boy carrying his sleeping roll, there was almost a foot race to the ruins at the far end of the mesa. The rain had now ceased and the stars were beginning to peep through the clouds. Ned and Alan led the way. Making for the eastern opening in the semicircle of trees, the boys, with Salty Bill not far behind, had just reached the entrance to the enclosure when the moon broke through the scurrying clouds.

There was a pause. Before them lay the white walls of the ancient palace. And in the center,

almost ghostlike, rose the Turquoise Temple.

"Dark again," sighed Bob Russell at once, as the moon disappeared, "but there she is."

"And there's the *Cibola*," added Ned, pointing to the skeleton-like car of the big balloon on the stone pathway opening before them.

In another moment the race was on again. It was apparent that nothing had molested the precious framework. But what of the contents of the temple chamber? The waiting treasure? The balloon itself? The engine and gasoline? Ned, who was the first to reach the turquoise-margined doorway, nervously struck a match, lit his candle and sprang within. The rest, equally curious, crowded close behind. The big chamber, cave-like with its two small windows opening to the north and south, was black with shadows. But Ned's companions hurried forward as he advanced to the corner where the *Cibola's* bag had been stored. His shout of satisfaction at finding the great envelope apparently as he had left it nearly two months before was the signal for a jubilee.

"Show me some of those Indian trinkets!" shouted Bob as he executed a wild dance on the smooth stone floor. "And some of those turquoise slabs and the mummies! That's what I want to see—buried treasure!"

"It's buried all right," laughingly answered Alan, who had now lit his own candle. While Ned turned to examine the engine Alan led the way to the corner of the apartment where nearly five hundred pounds of Aztec gold and silver had been piled. A heap of sand greeted the eyes of those behind him.

"That?" exclaimed Bob in a disappointed tone.

Alan ran his hand into the top of the sand, caught the corner of a heavy object and with the exclamation "Look out for your toes" sent it rolling with a thud to the hard stone floor.

"Item," he added laughing: "The body of the Sacred Eagle of the Aztecs—solid silver. Weight two hundred and eighteen pounds."

As the crude shimmering form rolled onto the floor, three open-mouthed spectators fell back as if it had been a wild animal.

"Item," continued Alan, thrusting his hand into the sand again and extracting a long, pointed object: "One wing of the Sacred Aztec Eagle, gold. Weight, twenty-eight pounds."

Bob Russell stepped forward and soberly and ceremoniously placed his hand first on the silver eagle and then on the golden wing.

"Well," he said at last, "I've been reading about buried treasure all my life. Now I've seen it. I've touched it. I'm satisfied."

"And if the rest of you are," exclaimed Ned from the rear, "everybody return to the landing place for the provision and mess kits. I'll scare up a fire while you are gone."

When his companions returned Ned's fire was roaring. As Alan and Bob came up the paved path they suddenly paused, as if fascinated by the scene.

"It's like a picture," whispered Bob.

Before them rose the turquoise-encrusted temple, its bleached and whitened sides showing like phosphorescence in the mingled glow of the new moonlight and the golden fire. Right and left stretched the ghostly white remnants of broken walls. Behind, the fringe of pines cut a band of black through the star-studded, misty sky. In the center, leaning against the side of the opening in the temple, his hat in his hand, his eyes thoughtfully on the flames and the black wet tangle of his hair low on his tired, bronzed face, stood Ned.

Alan slowly shook his head as if answering one of his own questions and then, as they started forward, exclaimed, half aloud:

"And there's the boy who made all this possible."

"Yes," answered Bob, "with Alan Hope to back him."

The sleeping rolls were equal to their advertised claims. Inside they were dry as bones. From them was unpacked dry clothing, and then, hanging their wet garments on the nearby broken walls, the tired boys reclined comfortably against the wall of the temple. It was after eleven o'clock.

"But what of that?" exclaimed Ned as the sizzle of Salty Bill's bacon sounded in their ears and the delicious aroma of hot coffee rose on the cool night air. "We'll sleep the sounder and get up when we like."

But long before the old guide had finished his last pipe of the day and while the welcome fire yet rose and fell, four tired boys in their blankets were fast asleep in the ancient Aztec Temple of the Sun.

CHAPTER XII

THE SNEERING IDOL

As Ned had anticipated, the *Cibola, Jr.* lost so much gas over night that its further use had to be abandoned. Since the "treasure train" was to start back not later than the morning of the next day, after a quick breakfast, Alan started with Salty Bill to place the hanging ladder. Ned, with Bob assisting him, began preparations for the reinflation of the big dirigible balloon and Elmer was given the task of re-drying the half-smoked venison and dividing the provisions into new packs.

Ned's first care, however, was to replace the engine in the car and test it. It had not suffered in the least. When it had been bolted in place, oiled, and run for a few moments, the shafts were replaced, and then the rudder, aeroplane guides and propeller were brought out and once more mounted. In the midst of their labors Ned and Bob were surprised to see Salty Bill and Alan struggling up the paved approach with the tank of water between them, and to discover that it was already noon.

"How about de rattler?" inquired Elmer at once.

"Rattler!" answered Alan with assumed contempt. "You mean rattlers. There was a convention of them." And he threw a handful of tail buttons on the ground. "We,—I mean Salty Bill—killed eight of 'em."

"Shoot 'em?" interrupted Bob.

"Shoot 'em?" snorted the old plainsman. "Waste good cartridges on a sarpint?"

"He knocked their heads off with a stick," explained Alan.

When dinner had been disposed of, Alan being now free to assist Ned, Bob and Salty Bill were assigned to the work of carrying the hydrogen cylinders to the temple. The reporter's face lengthened.

"Say, Ned," he began, "when do I get a peek into that treasure house?"

"Peek all you like," answered Ned smiling, as he at once led the way to the opening in the paved court in the rear of the temple.

"May I go down?" inquired the reporter appealingly.

"Certainly," answered Ned. "But you'd better get a candle."

A moment later the irrepressible young reporter had secured a light and had disappeared

within the cavernous underground khiva or religious chamber from which Ned and Alan had so recently removed a small fortune in metal and jewels.

Ned and Alan hastened to finish the readjustment of the car and its machinery. The work was fascinating and they soon completed it. Then came the mending of the big net.

As Ned drew the giant seine-like lengths from the temple chamber a footstep sounded on the pavement in the rear. The two boys looked up. A curious figure came slowly around the corner of the ruin. At first it was hardly recognizable. His skin plastered with greenish dust, his clothes odorous with the grime of ages, his hair stiff with the mud of dust and perspiration, Bob Russell exclaimed:

"Did you fellows go down into that hole under the square place in the middle?"

Ned and Alan turned to each other in double surprise.

"A hole under the—you mean under the platform in the middle of the big room?"

Bob nodded his head.

"We didn't know there was an opening there!"

"You didn't!" exclaimed Bob, his eyes blazing.

"Not there," said Ned in increased surprise.

"Did you—"

"Look here, now, boys, don't you fool me. Do you mean to tell me you didn't go down under that square thing?"

"We didn't know—"

The youthful reporter sprang into the air and let out a yell that startled even the distant Elmer and Salty Bill.

"That's all I want to know," he shouted. "You can have the whole blamed thing, but I *found* it. I've found buried treasure! I never thought I should, but I have. Hurrah for me!" He began pounding the two boys on their backs. "You can have it," he shouted anew, "and welcome to it. But score one for Bob Russell. I've found buried treasure at last. Hurrah!"

Ned and Alan were perplexed and mystified but they were nevertheless pleased.

Ned caught Bob by the shoulders and laughingly held him for a moment.

"What did you see?" insisted Ned.

"What did I see?" shouted Bob. "Why, *buried treasure*, of course."

"Yes, we know," interrupted Alan. "But what kind of treasure? Is there another room?"

"What kind?" exclaimed Bob, a trifle more composed. "Oh, things. I don't know what,—just things."

"All buried in dust?" suggested Ned.

"No," answered Bob. "Not dust. But it was dark and hot. Say, talk about hot—"

"And you don't know what you saw?" sharply interrupted Alan.

The exuberant reporter suddenly grew calmer.

"Say," he continued, "I guess I must have got rattled. But my hat fell off and I dropped the candle and,—and—well, I saw things sort of white and, and—sort of like dishes—"

Ned started for the khiva and then stopped.

"How did you get in?" he asked quickly.

"I didn't get in—I *looked* in. I saw that big, square stone in the middle of the little platform and I raised it up—I took out some little loose ones next to it—"

Ned turned to Alan.

"Better rig up our searchlight, hadn't we?"

It was hardly suggested before the boys were at the job.

While Ned adjusted the belt to the shaft Alan connected the long drag rope to the dynamo. Through this ran two copper wires. Several incandescent bulbs were yet intact in the *Cibola's* supply chest and one of these was attached to the free end of the drag.

"Now," exclaimed Ned, "I'll run the engine and you fellows have a good look. Bob, finish your discovery."

Elmer and Salty Bill had just arrived with another cylinder.

"Didn't see no rattlers, did yo'?" cautiously asked Elmer, when the situation had been explained.

"By George," exclaimed Bob as if a light had just burst on him. "That's just what I did see."

The colored boy stopped short.

"Hain't no Aztec treasure int'rests me whar dem fellers is." And he turned back.

"Hold on," laughed Bob. "They were dead—dead three or four hundred years—just bones; snaky little piles of white bones."

Only partly reassured, Elmer followed slowly. Alan held the light and then turned to Bob.

"It's your find, Bob; go ahead."

The begrimed reporter hesitated a moment and then sprang into the chamber of mystery.

The light bobbed back and forth a few times and then, before even Ned had time to see what was going on below, Bob's extended arms thrust a round, flat object up through the opening.

"Item," shouted an echoing voice from below: "One dish, not very heavy and I don't know what it is—gold, I hope."

Bob was imitating Ned's speech of the night before. All laughed, but nevertheless the boys above were quick to examine the new find. In no

respect was it like anything they had previously discovered. When a thin coat of dust was removed it was seen that Bob's first treasure was a wide, flat bowl—jet black, undecorated and with an enamel or glaze almost like glass.

"Item," it was Bob's voice again: "One fancy idol, not worth much except as a scarecrow."

The new object was certainly curious. It was the squat figure of a man with arms folded and resting on its knees. The material resembled terra-cotta and the thing was hollow. The fingers, rudely made, clasped each forearm tightly while the eyelids, brought flatly together except for a curved slit, gave the figure a human aspect that was made uncanny by the mouth. The lips, pressed closely together, had the appearance of having been pushed askew in the making and were set aslant as if in a sneer. In each elbow and in the front of each bent knee were semi-circular openings into the body. The idol, for such it undoubtedly was, measured about eighteen inches high.

"It doesn't look like an Indian," exclaimed Alan, examining the figure as critically as he could in the half light.

Just then there was another shout from below.

"Real item," exclaimed Bob: "One hitching-

weight or coiled snake. Feels like lead; but I hope it is silver."

As the boys drew this out they saw that Bob's newest treasure was a heavy and rude imitation in silver of a coiled rattlesnake.

"Thirty pounds and worth about \$200," laughed Alan.

"Another one," called Bob as he passed up a second silver snake. "And that's all, except rubbish and snake bones."

When he had clambered into the khiva again and the black bowl, the sneering idol and the two coiled snakes of silver had been carried into the open air, Ned was able to join the group. Bob was hot and dusty, and jubilant.

"They may not be worth much," he explained, "but I want you all to remember—I'm something of a treasure finder myself."

"I don't know about their not being worth much," remarked Ned after carefully examining the find. "The snakes are Indian, all right, but I'm inclined to think the bowl is of much older origin. Certainly the hollow image is not the work of the Indians who made this temple."

"Not Indian?" exclaimed Bob. "You don't mean it was made by white men?" And he gave the figure more serious attention.

"No," explained Ned. "But you know these

Indians, or Aztecs, had predecessors. Down in Mexico, buried in almost impenetrable forests, are cities and temples and carved statues. We only know that whoever made them had a civilization superior to the Indians of later times."

"And you think this bowl and idol came from Mexico?" interrupted Alan.

"Why not?" answered Ned, who had been thinking. "The rattlesnake was sacred to the Aztecs. The second chamber that Bob has just found was probably where those venerated reptiles were kept. Any other object of adoration might also be jealously guarded in the same place. This idol and this bowl may have come in some mysterious way from the even yet unexplored treasure houses of Mitla, the Vale of the Dead, Copan or Cholula. If they did, you can be sure they were valued beyond gems or gold."

Bob's eyes opened. "Then this idol may be more than three hundred and fifty years old?" he asked.

"It may be more than three thousand five hundred years old," answered Ned.

The young reporter sat down on a fallen stone of the temple wall and gasped.

"Well, what do you think of that!" he exclaimed at last.

"I think," answered Ned, "that Major Honey-

well will vote your idol the most valuable thing we have yet found."

Bob then described the appearance of the chamber. The black bowl he had found on the floor in the center of the apartment, and the figure of the sneering idol on a square rock near the eastern wall. The two snake images had guarded it on either side.

"And the rock?" exclaimed Ned.

"Just rock," answered Bob. "So I left it there."

"Nothing else?" queried Ned.

"Except snake bones," laughed Bob. "Plenty of those."

"I don't suppose you mind my having a look?" Ned added, laughing in turn.

"No," exclaimed Bob enthusiastically. "If my idol is three thousand years old you may have all the bones in the Chamber of the Sacred Rattlesnakes, and welcome," he added, taking up the hollow image with careful hands.

Alan started the engine and the electric light again and Ned took a turn at exploring. The young leader disappeared into the khiva with Elmer and Salty Bill close behind to give him assistance in getting out of the lower chamber again after he had got in. For perhaps a quarter of an hour nothing was heard from him. Then he suddenly reappeared. Apparently his quest had been

unrewarded, for he carried nothing with him. When Ned emerged from the upper chamber into the daylight, Bob was still sitting near his treasures. He was now polishing the black bowl, the sides of which had begun to glisten like jet.

"I suspect that that was a water bowl for the snakes," remarked Ned.

Bob looked up. "Draw a blank?" he inquired.

"You didn't have time to examine the walls, did you?" asked Ned, as he wiped the perspiration from his hot face.

"I looked them over pretty carefully," answered Bob. "I thought there might be a passageway."

"Did you sound them?" asked Ned.

"You did, and you found something!" exclaimed Bob, jumping up.

"Yes," said Ned, motioning to Alan to join them. "I found a place in the wall that gave a hollow sound. Then I saw that the stone closing it could be removed. It came out easily. Behind it was a niche about nine inches deep. In it was this—"

With as much composure as he could command Ned drew from the bosom of his shirt a glistening, sky-blue dish—a carved and polished piece of turquoise about four inches in diameter and two and a half inches in its greatest thickness.

"And this was the top or lid," added Ned as he also exhibited a disc of shimmering and iridescent mother-of-pearl, slightly curved, which fitted the turquoise cup perfectly.

Exclamations of wonder and admiration arose on all sides.

"Scooped!" dejectedly groaned Bob. "And on my own story!"

"This," explained Ned calmly, "I suppose represents the holy of Indian holies. No Indian but a Snake Priest could have reached it even had he known of the secret niche."

"And I suppose," interrupted Alan, "that this is easily the finest example of turquoise the world has ever known."

"Wa'nt dey nothin' in de cup?" interrupted the practical Elmer.

For answer Ned thrust a hand in his trousers pocket and extracted something which he concealed within his fingers.

Then, throwing his handkerchief over the closed hand as a magician might do, he stepped back a pace, fluttered the folds of the linen in a swift movement and revealed the object that has ever since been connected with his name—the Napier emerald.

Nestling in the white handkerchief lay a rich grass-green jewel, as large as a pigeon's egg,

crudely polished and aglow with the pent-up incandescence of its lustrous fire. For a moment no one spoke. Even to the uninitiated among the spectators the richness and value of the gem was apparent. Then, before the excitement of close examination began, Bob sprang forward and grasped Ned's hand: "Bully for you, old man! That just shows the difference between thinking you know and knowing how to think!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE RETURN CARAVAN SETS OUT

When the excitement following this momentous discovery had somewhat abated Salty Bill recalled to the boys that there were other things requiring immediate attention.

"The fuss over this emerald, or whatever ye like to call a black speckled piece o' green glass, reminds me," suggested Salty Bill, "of a fine bag o' gold dust a feller onct got together down on the Rio Grande. It was wuth a good deal, an' he tried to bring it out over the Estacado plains. The man had his choice between less gold and more water an' he cut out the water. He died huggin' the bag o' dust. I reckon, in the end, he would 'a' guv it all fur a drink. My pony and them burros ain't had no water sence yisterday. I got to go look after 'em."

The boys felt the rebuke. It was immediately arranged that Salty Bill should descend from the mesa, carry the iron water-box to the stream again, care for the stock and return as soon as he could. Then early the following morning he was to make one more trip and bring the burros back to the mesa preparatory to leaving that night.

Since all would have to assist in making the balloon ready the departure of the caravan might be at a late hour, but all were to get away, if possible, the next evening, the *Cibola* making its first dash for McElmo Canyon just before the caravan crew set out.

But, in spite of every effort, by four o'clock the next afternoon it was seen that these plans would have to be changed. The filling of the *Cibola* bag had not yet begun. The work was delayed by a decision to add at least fifty pounds of the valuable turquoise to the other baggage. For several hours that morning, while Ned and Alan were desperately applying themselves to the *Cibola's* reconstruction, the young reporter and Elmer worked in the khiva. Bit by bit the rich blue pieces were pried loose and removed in small bags. But at noon Ned called a halt on this.

The transfer of the stores and metal was then renewed. When Salty Bill arrived with the last box of water and the ponies and burros, at about one o'clock, he found the boys as busy as a regiment on parade. But they were attempting the impossible.

Ned finally announced that although everything might be finished that evening except the inflation of the balloon, on no account would he undertake that after dark. Therefore, when the

last of the packs had been lowered to the plain, all hands turned in to fill the sand bags that were to be used in holding the bag while it was being inflated. This important work was set for dawn the next morning, and all thought of getting away that day was abandoned.

It was dark before the last of the many tasks was accomplished.

The spoils were packed carefully. The small balloon had been cut up and the pieces used as packing, and by nesting the flat Indian bowls and dishes in each other, a considerable quantity of the khiva earthenware remains was suitably arranged for transportation. Within the cabin of the *Cibola* Ned had also stored the swathed mummy of an Aztec chief. And in the same place, so that it might be safer from breakage, was also stored the sneering idol found by Bob.

"If all goes well, with you and with us," explained Ned to Bob, "you ought to reach McElmo in four days. By that time we shall have carried Major Honeywell to this place, shown him the mesa and returned to join you in Senor Oje's camp."

"And if anything does go wrong?" exclaimed Bob, stretched on his back in tired relaxation.

"If it's you," answered Ned jovially, "I guess the *Cibola* can come to your help."

"And if it's the *Cibola*?" persisted Bob.

No one replied for a moment and then Salty Bill, sitting somewhat removed and drawing on his sputtering pipe, said slowly:

"I reckon we kin do the same fur the balloon."

None knew then how soon Ned and Alan were to be in sore need of help, which Salty Bill with all his loyalty and zeal would not be able to give them.

At the last moment Ned decided to pass the night with the old guide on the plain beneath, and long before he and Salty Bill had made the tiresome descent the other boys were fast asleep.

Some time after midnight, to his consternation, Ned was awakened by a drizzle of rain. He made himself as comfortable as he could in his bed roll, but his heart sank as the shower finally settled into a steady downpour; and when he and Salty Bill climbed up the mesa at what should have been daylight the young leader was in a quandary that bordered on despair. The bag of the *Cibola* and its net lay heavy on the ground. In the steady rain still falling there was not the slightest hope for inflation. Ned and Alan had a long and earnest conference, and as Salty Bill served a damp and frugal breakfast in the temple chamber, Ned announced the result:

"The land party leaves at once," he said firm-



THE GROUP MADE ITS WAY TO THE PLAIN BELOW.

ly. "Our limited stock of provisions makes this absolutely necessary. Alan and I will leave on the *Cibola* when the sun comes out and we can fill her."

The others could hardly believe their senses.

"You can't fill her alone," exclaimed Bob.

"We've got to fill her alone," answered Ned with determination.

There was no arguing with the young aeronaut when he took the tone he now used. A half hour later the far from cheerful group made its way through the persistent rain down the chasm steps to the tunnel, and then, one by one, to the plain below. In the work of repacking and cinching the animals the spirits of all rose somewhat and there was even some cheerfulness. Then came the farewells, and, his pipe newly lit, Salty Bill grasped each boy by the hand.

"We'll git out all right, boys, and I ain't no doubt ye'll do the same. Ef ye can't, why, jist stick it out an' I'll be back in a week. And don't ye leave onless everything's all right. Wait fur me."

Elmer said good-bye under protest.

"Don't you s'pose I'd better stay?" he petitioned. "I'm kind o' handy 'round a balloon."

But Ned shook his head.

"Don't worry about us, Elmer," he said smil-

ing. "You help get the metal and pottery out. We'll be all right."

Then came the last grasp of Bob's hand. As Bob's fingers touched Ned's, the young reporter felt a small hard object. He started in surprise, but he did not even look. He knew instantly that Ned had placed the precious emerald in his grasp. And he knew, too, without words, what that meant. Wringing his young leader's hand anew Bob, with tears almost showing in his eyes, exclaimed:

"Good-bye, boys. We realize what we have to do and we'll do it. There won't be a thing, big or little, broken or lost. Meet us at the camp on McElmo. And let the first fellows there start the beans a-boiling. Good-bye!"

Ned and Alan followed the little train to the end of the mesa and then, sitting on the rocks, watched it grow smaller and smaller in the gray mist of the still falling rain. At last Salty Bill and his companions reached a jutting spur of the hills far to the east. There was an indistinct view of waving hats, the muffled crack of a revolver shot and the burros gradually disappeared behind the rocks.

The two boys looked at each other and Ned laughed.

"Old man," he said at last, throwing his arm

about Alan's shoulders. "When a fellow is stranded on an island in the sea he has to swim or stay. When you are stranded on an island in the sky you've got to fly. Let's get busy and fly."

The boys slowly scaled the wet face of the towering mesa, drew up the rope ladder—wondering if they were ever to lower it again—made their way once more through the close, damp tunnel and the chasm, and thence to the temple and the balloon. They were helpless until the rain should cease and the sun come out. As there was nothing more to be done until they could begin filling the dried-out bag, Ned and Alan found time for a real rest and leisure to think.

Just at dark the soft, misty rain ceased wholly. But in the dark work on the balloon was out of the question, and, besides, the bag was yet heavy and unmanageable.

"We'll get up at three o'clock," suggested Ned, "and begin work with the first light."

Before the boys turned in that night the moon came out brilliantly with promise of a fine day on the morrow. But the promise was not fulfilled. Twice in the night the rain began again and ceased and when day broke a north wind was sweeping over the mesa that was as bad for the work in hand as the rain.

"There's nothing to do but wait," said Alan philosophically. "Grin and bear it; it's bound to end some time."

"We can at least dry the bag," suggested Ned. "That will help some."

The sun did not appear once during the day. Nor did the wind, though it swelled and diminished in turn, once fall so low as to permit of beginning work. The great silken bag was raised on low supports, carefully weighted, and thus dried. But, between dawn and dark, it was never possible to attempt raising it in the air where there was a chance that it would be whipped into shreds. So the second day of waiting passed.

About the middle of the afternoon Alan, impatient over the delay and tired of idleness, suddenly determined to spend an hour or so in the khiva secret chamber.

"I may pick up something we've overlooked," he said with a laugh.

Procuring a couple of candles, he invited Ned to accompany him. But the latter, who had been sitting a good part of the day near the big *Cibola* car, seemed scarcely to hear the invitation.

"What are you doing? Figuring out a new balloon?" asked Alan.

Ned turned. "No," he answered at last. "I was just thinking—but go on, I'll stay here."

And before Alan left him Ned had again turned to the spruce and aluminum car and was once more oblivious to all else in a close examination of it. After Alan disappeared in the khiva Ned hung over the car, its engine and its equipment as if consumed with a sudden curiosity. Then he stepped back and examined the craft from a distance, and then again threw himself flat on the paved walk; and finally he began making sketches in his note book.

Had there been any one to observe him he would have seen that the young aeronaut was engrossed with some idea. But Alan was busy with the dusty remains in the treasure room below, and Ned sat and thought and figured unseen and undisturbed. At last, suddenly conscious that the afternoon was waning, the lad aroused himself, closed his note book, and, recalling the long absence of his chum, hastened toward the khiva opening.

CHAPTER XIV

AFLOAT ONCE MORE

As Ned hurried in search of his chum he noticed that the sudden gloom was not wholly that of the coming night. Dark clouds had again banked up in the north and, for the first time, there was a suggestion of chill in the air. A puff of cool wind whirled the ashes of the cook fire in a little cloud. On the lake at home Ned would have said that the conditions presaged a wind storm. He hesitated.

Resting on the uneven temple walls, although weighted against the steady breeze of the day, the bag was in the worst possible position to face a high wind. So Ned threw off the rocks that had been used to hold down the silken folds and attempted to roll up the delicate fabric. But without Alan this was difficult work.

Dropping the bag he ran to the mouth of the khiva and called to his chum. There was no answer. Thrusting his head into the opening he shouted again. Still no answer. He looked at the sky. The air was quiet but everything foreboded a sudden and violent storm. Should it come and irreparably damage the precious bag

—but that possibility Ned put aside instantly. His thought was now wholly of Alan. For another moment he glanced about and then, leaving the balloon to its fate, he sprang into the opening beneath him.

Then he remembered that he had no light—even his match bottle he had put aside when he changed his wet clothes the night before. But he stumbled hastily through the suffocating dust, feeling his way forward by the circling pillars. And with each step he called anew. But in the tomblike silence there was no answer but the muffled echo of his own alarmed voice. Then he paused to think. What could have happened to his companion? He could think of but one thing—asphyxiation.

Even the delay of securing a light might be fatal. The space to be explored was small. He would do it without the help of a light. Pushing his way to the edge of the circular chamber he made a circuit of the place. But he knew that while he was doing this Alan might be lying helpless only a few feet beyond the narrow circle of his exploration. And even that work, as hastily as it was done, nearly suffocated the agitated Ned. He was choking with dust and panting from his exertion.

When he reached the tunnel leading to the east

he paused again, dazed and undecided. Then he plunged into this passageway. The Room of the Mummies, at the far end, was smaller. The chance of suffocation was even greater there, but plucky Ned did not debate the matter. If Alan were there he must find him. In time he reached the east room and dragged himself from wall to wall in his quest. The room was *empty*. Ned felt his way along the rude benches on which rested the mummies. Even the gruesome touch of these did not revolt him. His only thought was of Alan—his chum!

Again he called. But now only a hoarse cry escaped him. His throat and lungs were clogged with dust. Then he realized that he himself was in peril. At the same moment his half-muddled thoughts fixed themselves on the secret chamber beneath the khiva. It was the only place left. Dragging himself along the wall benches Ned reached the tunnel again, and then, leaning against the rude masonry, he started back. The heat had grown intense. His fingers were bleeding and his breath came in labored gasps.

Without knowing how he accomplished it Ned found himself at last lying over the little entrance to the second secret chamber under the khiva. He called hoarsely again and again, but there was no answer. Then he knew that he must have

air or further search would be impossible, and, wet with perspiration, choked with dust and exhausted with the strain, he crawled with great effort to the near-by ladder. At the foot of it he fell. But a breath of air put new life in him and with a last desperate attempt he drew himself to the opening above.

As he reached the top of the ladder a roar of wind swept over him. With it his wandering thoughts rushed back. His trembling limbs and bleeding face and hands were forgotten. The balloon! It must be saved.

Springing forward, the weakened boy fell, but was up in a moment and staggering ahead. At the temple corner he paused an instant and then, feeling stronger, he hurried around the structure. As he emerged from behind the temple wall the real storm broke. He heard a pine tree snap and then suddenly the great bag of the *Cibola* rose in the air like a yellow cloud. Ned's heart sank. Then hope sprang up in him. The silken, snapping bag had caught on the jagged rocks of the wall on which it had been spread.

The puff of wind had passed and the fluttering bag sank again to the ground. Perhaps, after all, the damage would be no more than a tear that he could mend. With feverish activity Ned reached and caught the great silken pile, now

bulging with imprisoned air. At the same moment he stopped as if paralyzed. Directly opposite him in the half gloom he saw the set face of Alan. And Alan was as desperately at work on his side of the bag as was Ned. With feverish haste the boys hauled the delicate fabric together like a loose, flapping jib—neither boy speaking—and in less than a minute the two exhausted lads were holding the jumbled silken case safely behind a sheltering wall.

Weak from his search and disconcerted by the narrowly arrested catastrophe, Ned was hardly in control of himself. The sight of his chum, safe and sound, completely upset him. With a cry of joy he threw himself on Alan, buried his head in his friend's shoulder for a moment and then exclaimed:

“Where have you been? Are you all right?”

“I? Why, I’ve been asleep in the temple. It must be late. But what’s the matter?” repeated Alan, as he began to appreciate Ned’s condition.

“I’m a little upset,” murmured Ned. “I’ll be all right in a moment. You didn’t return. I thought you were in the khiva. You didn’t answer and I got nervous. I piled into the place and the dust rather knocked me out—”

Alan grasped his chum’s hand.

“I can’t tell you how sorry I am, Ned,” he ex-

claimed with feeling. "I did go into the khiva, but I came out in a little while. You were busy thinking and drawing. I didn't disturb you. I went into the temple room and lay down and fell asleep. I'm awfully sorry."

"There's nothing to be sorry about," answered Ned, trying to smile. "I just got rattled. I guess this waiting got on my nerves. But it's all right. We've saved the bag."

"Yes," answered Alan. "We have. And now, what's next?"

Ned reached out his blood-smeared and begrimed hands.

"A bath for me," he exclaimed cheerfully. "Even if it's a canary-bird wash. Some supper and then—wait, I suppose, for this to blow over."

The next day brought joy to the two boys. It came with sunshine and calm. With a hasty breakfast Ned and Alan flew at the work awaiting them. Before seven o'clock the rescued bag had been rolled onto a blanket and drawn to the waiting car just outside the ruins. As if spreading the cloth at a picnic luncheon the young aeronauts gently laid the silken folds on the sand. Then, suddenly, their gaiety changed to consternation. A glaring rip at least ten feet long unfolded before them. Alan was in despair. So,

for a moment, was Ned. Then he laughed and looked at his watch.

"Coming in bunches, isn't it?" he said cheerfully. "I suppose that means three hours' work anyway. But I'm prepared for it."

Again Ned's little black trunk was opened.

"My repair kit," he explained. And after a full examination of the bag to make sure that no other injury had been done to it, the two boys went at their task. It was not an easy job. The work resembled the mending of a sail, and the boys' fingers seemed all thumbs. But with a double strip of silk as a foundation the severed edges were drawn together and crudely but closely united. More than once Ned and Alan, working from the two ends, arose to stretch themselves and straighten their backs. At eleven o'clock the sewing was done.

Then Ned produced a can of dissolved rubber cement, which he applied to the seam. Allowing nearly another hour for this to dry thoroughly the seam was varnished, and it was then time for luncheon. The morning had been perfect. The dry air had a little crispness in it and the boys were full of new ardor. But in the midst of their luncheon came a new alarm—again a little breeze swept over the mesa top. The boys sprang up together.

"There's no use in hurrying now," suggested Ned. "If it's coming again, it's coming."

But the new breeze was so light that the boys determined to take chances, and they continued their preparations.

Since it was manifestly impossible for the boys to inflate the big bag before connecting it with the car, Ned and Alan boldly decided to attempt another method. The bottom of the great silken envelope was carefully lifted to the top of the car. Then the inflation tube was passed through a hole made in the network of the bridge and extended to the ground. This done, the balloon bag itself was laid in loose, lateral folds on the runway extending from end to end on top of the car. The overlapping ends of the bag were piled loosely in the ends of the runway free of the rudder and propeller. The giant net was then laid over all. The top of it was centered over the middle of the runway and the supporting ropes were made fast to the car frame, each in its place.

The bags of sand which had been prepared to hold the balloon while it was being filled in the ordinary way now came into a new use. They were piled along the lower framework of the car to insure an anchorage until all was ready for the departure. This took the boys about half the afternoon. The breeze continued, but it was not

as strong as the day before. And yet, while it held, Ned did not dare to think of inflating the bag.

All other preparations having been completed, the boys made everything taut and snug in the car. The Aztec chieftain mummy, shrouded in a piece of the captive balloon, was lashed to the net on the bridge of the car. The wonderful sneering idol, to avoid damage from a possible jar, was suspended from the cabin roof by a rope around its neck. The little food left was put aboard and the water bottles were filled.

The boys were just thinking of rolling up the empty bag for the night when, suddenly, the wind fell. It was a quarter to five o'clock.

"Well," exclaimed Alan, looking at Ned, "shall we do it? We can fill the bag by dark and leave at dawn."

For answer Ned walked over to the pile of hydrogen cylinders and rolled one hastily to the place arranged. The inflation hose and tube were ready. With a few quick turns the coupling on the hose was made fast to the cylinder valve and a half turn of a wrench set free the precious gas.

This was admitted slowly at first, that it might be distributed without undue pressure on any one fold of the bag. As the expanding hydrogen rushed through the big inflation tube and made

its way into the limp folds of the bag above, Ned, making his way back and forth along the framework of the car, shook out the folds of the balloon and adjusted the net. Then it was that the two boys experienced every difficulty they had anticipated and a few they had not foreseen.

As the bag filled and rose and shifted lazily under its new buoyancy, the task became too much for Ned. More than once Alan came to his assistance. Lost in the billowy folds of the swaying envelope the perspiring boys tugged and strained and shouted to each other as they strove to center the bag properly in the net.

In the course of the work both boys had crawled to the same side of the car. The crowding bag had been held back by pushing in the protuberant sides. Suddenly the bag got beyond the boys' control. Swinging forward, it settled on Ned and Alan in a big, smothering billow. Unable to push the balloon back and unable to call to each other, both boys found it necessary to loosen their hold on the car and drop to the ground. And before either could speak both made the alarming discovery that the wind was rising again.

"If we are in for it, let's finish the job," exclaimed Alan.

The big bag seemed infused with savage life

by the breeze. Its lunge forward seemed to settle it in the net and in places it was already tugging at the car supports. Four more cylinders of gas remained to be emptied, and it was rapidly growing dark. Both boys sprang to the task of changing the tanks. By the time two of these had been emptied, night had fallen, and the *Cibola* was straining in the rising breeze. Down from the dark mass, dimly outlined above, reached the taut car supports.

"I guess she has almost all she can stand," suggested Alan.

"No," exclaimed Ned, "it's the wind. Give her all you have. We may need it tomorrow."

Another cylinder was attached and emptied. While Alan did this, working in the dark, Ned took time to look about. The sun, which had gone down a blood-red disc, had been followed by almost immediate darkness. The hazy blue sky of the evening had become a black dome unpierced by a star. And there was something about the fickle wind that Ned did not like. It was gusty and presaged a storm.

Even as he studied the situation a new and stronger puff hit him. He ran swiftly to the balloon. The over-spreading bag had felt the force of the puff and the car was creaking under the strain.

The situation was serious. Another such puff and the *Cibola's* bag might be punctured. The last cylinder was being emptied. If the wind continued there was but one thing to do—cut loose. The two boys hastened to the car. Each knew what the other was thinking.

“The only trouble about going up at once,” said Ned at last, “is that we’ll certainly drift. We can’t hope to pick up the McElmo Canyon camp in the dark and in a heavy storm we may lose our bearings.”

“Anyway,” suggested Alan, “there’s nothing more to do on the mesa. Let’s get aboard.”

Closing the inflation tube, they did so, and once again the *Cibola* was manned and ready for flight.

“Feels homelike, anyway,” went on Alan. Ned made no response.

Several light gusts of wind followed and the big bag swung above them like a pendulum. Each time the young aeronauts’ hearts sank with apprehension. Then followed a calm. Ned’s conclusion had been reached.

“She’s coming,” he exclaimed quickly. “I can feel it. It’s our only chance. Heave over the bags.”

With all the speed they could make in the intense darkness both boys fell to the task.

"All ready," shouted Ned. "One!"

As he gave the word each boy tumbled a heavy bag overboard. To preserve the car's balance they worked simultaneously at both ends of the lower runway.

"Two!" As Ned spoke the distant sound of the wind filled the night.

"It's a hurricane," shouted Ned. "*Let 'em all go!*"

But they were too late. With a hiss the fore-runner of the storm arrived, and the great bag, falling before it, hit the ground.

There was no need for further orders. Each boy knew that his speed meant their safety. The wind was from the northeast, and the car lay north and south. As the bag lunged before the gale the bow shot upward. Ned, who was working on the front runway, slipped, caught at the car supports, and a dozen bags of sand slid to the ground. The accident was the salvation of the straining car and the pounding bag. Poised for a moment at an angle of forty-five degrees, the skeleton car creaked, and then, like a released spring, righted. The mesa shot out from under the clinging boys and the *Cibola* on the breast of the storm hurled itself into black space.

CHAPTER XV

A MAELSTROM AMONG THE CLOUDS.

The released *Cibola* shot upward into the void of night with unmeasured speed. Laboriously regaining his foothold on the runway, Ned, thinking only of his chum, hastily made his way on his hands and knees to the cabin and then to the rear runway.

"Alan," he shouted. "Are you safe?"

For answer there was an exclamation of joy.

"I was afraid to call out," responded the welcome voice of Alan. "I was afraid you—you—"

"Had dropped off?" Ned finished for him. "Well, I didn't. And we are all right, safe from stone walls and trees at least. Did you save any of the ballast?"

"That's what I'm doing," was the cheery reply. "I'm lying on about a dozen bags of it. If we're done bumping I'll get up. Give me a hand."

When the valuable bags that Alan at the risk of his own life had preserved from sliding overboard had been carefully carried into the cabin of the *Cibola*, the young aeronauts climbed onto the bridge of the flying balloon. Then they at-

tempted to get their bearings. The inclined support ropes plainly indicated that the *Cibola* was flying silently before a tremendous wind. And the rapidly lowering temperature was proof that they had already reached a high altitude. The boys could easily perceive that they were now shooting upward with uncontrollable speed. The loss of fifteen sand bags on the forward runway and three on the rear runway meant that the balloon was nearly five hundred pounds too light.

There was no need to consult the compass. The direction of the wind on the mesa and the sharp angle of the ropes made it plain that the *Cibola* was driving with tremendous velocity to the southwest.

"I suppose it's useless to think of starting the propeller against this wind," said Alan, pulling his cap low on his head and clinging to the bridge net.

"It is," answered Ned. "We might alter our course, but we are sure to break something. And why should we? We should only use good gasoline. We'll need all of that if we lose ourselves. Certainly we can't think of a landing. We must ride out the gale."

"How about the altitude?" asked Alan, closely buttoning his jacket as a new and sudden chill struck them. Before he could reply a fog blotted

the boys from sight of each other, although they were but a few feet apart.

"That's a cloud," shouted Ned, feeling his way along the protecting net. "We are surely getting up. Let's have a look at the barometer."

Crawling to the cabin ladder, Ned and Alan made their way below and fumbling about in the dark at last got their hands on the supply box and the flash lantern.

"Sixteen thousand, four hundred feet," said Ned, as the light fell on the instrument swinging just over the pilot platform.

"Look!" exclaimed Alan excitedly, as he pointed to the cabin window.

The scudding car had passed into a flood of moonlight.

"Above the clouds," explained Ned. "But not above the storm."

It was true. The *Cibola* had penetrated and passed through the stratum of clouds covering the mountains and desert below. The sight was magnificent.

"We may as well go up and enjoy it," suggested Ned. "But we'll be comfortable while we are at it."

On Ned's advice they wrapped themselves in double blankets and once more mounted to the bridge. Below them, like banks of snow, a toss-

ing sea of clouds flew swiftly in their wake. About them mile-long waves of vapor shot silver arrows, while, above, the black starry sky opened again like a velvet canopy studded with gems. A glance at the thermometer just before they emerged from the cabin showed that the mercury had already fallen to 28° above zero.

The sight transfixed the boys. Grasping the bridge supports and clinging together they stood for many minutes without words. Cloud ridges rushed into view and disappeared; and now and then, for a few moments, the rising *Cibola* cut its way through a chilling bank of vapory mist.

"Have you any idea how fast we are traveling?" asked Alan at last, his teeth chattering and his face dripping with the almost freezing moisture from the clouds.

"Anywhere between forty and sixty miles," Ned answered. "But did you ever feel it so cold at 28° ?"

For answer Alan grasped him by the arm.

"The water!" he shouted. "The water in the cooling tubes!"

In an instant both boys were in the cabin again. The possibility of the water in the cooling tubes freezing had been forgotten. Anxiously Ned flew to the engine and the tubes and hastily

opened the exhaust cock. To his relief he found that the contents of the tubes were yet liquid. But both knew they were none too soon. Blankets were wrapped around the bank of tubes and made fast. This done, Ned looked at his watch. It was twenty minutes after nine o'clock.

"We left the mesa just before eight o'clock," he said, "and we've been an hour and twenty-five minutes on our travels."

Alan did a little mental calculation.

"What's seventy-five miles southwest of where we started?" he asked at last.

"Desert," answered Ned laughing. "Or, at the best, an Indian reservation."

Not caring to waste fuel in running the engine to provide electric light, and not daring to use a candle so near the hydrogen bag, the young aeronauts sat for a time in the dark and cheerless cabin. When the gloom became too oppressive they ascended to the bridge and then, driven back by the constantly increasing cold, they returned to the protected cabin again. Meanwhile the *Cibola*, with what seemed to be ever-increasing velocity, darted onward through the silvery cloud-land like a gliding bird.

"I think we'll come back by train," exclaimed Ned at last, slapping his chest with his benumbed hands. "We can't reel off fifty or sixty miles an

hour like this all night without getting somewhere."

"Well," said Alan after some thought, "we are not going to bump into anyone, and we can't stop. What's the matter with a little snooze?"

Ned answered by suggesting that they stand watches, but as there did not seem to be any real use in this he relinquished the idea. But before trying to sleep he consulted the barometer again.

"Eighteen thousand feet," he exclaimed. "That's good. I guess we've stopped going up. Vapor on the bag," he added.

A short time later the two boys, curled up together on the cabin floor and protected by the same blankets, tried to get some rest. For a long time neither moved nor spoke, each hoping that the other had fallen asleep. But finally, thoroughly chilled and wholly sleepless, they could keep quiet no longer. It had begun to grow dark again. As Alan sat up and peered out of the cabin Ned raised himself.

"It's getting dark," said Alan.

"I thought I was going to sleep," answered Ned. Then he sprang up. "We may be falling," he added hastily.

But it was a false alarm. The moon was swiftly going down. It was now about half past twelve o'clock and the *Cibola* was still drifting with ter-

rific speed toward the southwest. The boys hastened to the bridge. A scrap of paper tossed over showed that the car was no longer rising.

Sleep being out of the question, Ned and Alan sought to kill time and get their blood in better circulation by walking back and forth on the upper runways. But as the moon gradually passed from sight and blackness again surrounded them, the boys gave up the hazardous patrol and made themselves as comfortable as they could in a corner of the bridge netting.

In spite of their uncomfortable position both of them at last drifted into a kind of half-sleep out of which Ned was the first to arouse himself. His face and hair were dripping wet; the bridge deck was heavy with moisture; not even a star was to be seen, and Ned was conscious that they were rushing through a dense fog. The hurricane was still driving them onward, but there were cross gusts and swirls of wind that drove the thick vapor in his face and indicated new air currents.

The car itself had a new motion. It was moving swiftly forward, but in leaps and bounds. Ned, for the first time, became alarmed. Arousing Alan he explained the situation.

"What do you make of it?" anxiously asked Alan, striving in vain to distinguish something beyond the fog in which they were buried.

"At sea," answered Ned, "cross currents mean many things. They always mean storms. But we have a storm now. I—"

As he spoke the car shook violently and the support ropes shot off toward the side—a sure sign that the bag above was under a cross pressure.

"Stand by the valve rope," exclaimed Ned with alarm in his voice, "and don't leave it."

A sudden gust of wind, apparently from below, had swept the chilling vapor cuttingly into their faces.

"We may be falling!"

He sprang into the cabin and caught up the barometer and flashlight.

"No," he called back a moment later reassuringly. "Still 18,000 feet—we're not falling."

As he climbed back into the bridge there was another shock. The *Cibola* creaked and swerved again. Had Alan been near enough to Ned's face he would have seen it turn pale with alarm. Again the young commander dropped into the cabin and sprang to the pilot platform. One flash of the light on the big compass confirmed his fears. The *Cibola* was turning, slowly but surely revolving, and even as he looked again Ned detected the increasing speed of the rotation.

Hurrying back to the bridge he said, calmly enough now:

"Alan, I guess we're in for it. We're in a wind-spout."

"A wind-spout?" whispered his chum.

"And it's as bad for a balloon as a water-spout is for a ship."

"I can't feel it," said Alan, anxiously.

"And what's worse, we can't see it," added Ned. "Hang onto that valve. We are on the edge of the spout. In a little time we may be in the vortex of it."

"And then?" asked Alan in alarm.

"The wind will hug that bag up there like a vise. When the grip of the spout gets strong enough the compressed gas may tear open the bag. Then," added Ned, "we'll go down where it's warmer—and pretty quick."

"Let's throw open the valve and get out now, while we can," shouted Alan.

"That's the thing to do," answered his companion. "But we'll take every chance first. We won't waste a foot of gas until we have to. You hang onto the valve rope. I'll watch the inflation tube. If the spout grips the bag I can tell it by the rush of gas in the tube. Until that comes we'll ride it out—perhaps we can work our way through it."

The *Cibola* made a long, sweeping glide and then, to the surprise of the boys, its motion seemed almost to cease; with a tremble the craft seemed to poise; the vapor surrounding it seemed to rush ahead and then, as if dropping down an incline, the car fell sideways with a jerk that threw both of the young aeronauts to their knees.

"Did you open the valve?" shouted Ned.

"No—"

"Then do it—wide—pull!"

But Alan was powerless to act. Before he could draw the cord the bag of the *Cibola* keeled on its side and then sprang up into the vortex of the wind-spout like a feather into a vacuum. As it righted and struck the gyrating maelstrom of air the sides of the great bag crushed towards each other, rebounded into place, and then the giant oblong shape almost doubling on itself, the straining silken envelope whirled into a twisting spiral. The car, responding like a weight at the end of a string, rushed toward the horizon and then, at an angle of nearly forty-five degrees, followed the twist of the bag in a great dizzying circle.

Ned lay on the outer and higher run of the bridge, his arms thrust through the netting. To attempt to move was defying almost certain

death. Alan, on the lower portion of the bridge, was safely jammed against the netting.

"The valve, Alan,—the valve!"

Through the roar of the creaking car, the straining bag and the rush of wind came the answer:

"She's open—wide!"

Ned could not even look above. He was under the strain of a man hanging from a trapeze. But he knew from the motion of the wildly flying car that there was no pause in their ascent. They were being sucked into the maelstrom of air like a bit of straw. One thing only could happen. When the pressure of the gripping vortex became strong enough the bag of the *Cibola* would collapse. What could be done?

"The rip cord!" called Ned. "Can you reach it?"

He was conscious that Alan, although he could not see him, was attempting to pull himself to the corner of the bridge where the rip cord was made fast. It was a desperate chance. Sick with the nauseating spin of the swiftly whirling car Ned felt his hold weakening. But the use of the rip cord meant a sheer drop of two miles. The collapse of the bag itself would not be worse.

"Wait," he cried hoarsely; "wait—" Like a man drowning he was grasping at straws. Then he closed his eyes and tried to think.

Before he could say more or Alan could act the circling car lunged still higher with a mighty jerk and Ned's benumbed fingers gave way. Like a rocket his body shot backwards along the bridge floor and struck the rear end with a thud. With a sickening rebound, before the exhausted boy could clutch the ropes, he plunged forward toward miles of empty space. But two strong young arms were awaiting him. At the risk of his life Alan had cast off his hold on the netting and thrown himself forward on the deck. With Ned clasped in his arms Alan rolled down against the light net.

"The rip cord?" hoarsely whispered Ned, digging his numbed fingers into the cordage. "Where?"

But Alan did not answer.

"The cord?" muttered Ned, thrusting his own cold face against Alan's. But there was no answer. The plunge to the floor had knocked Alan senseless. In the realization of this new calamity Ned was doubly helpless. Powerless, he caught the unconscious form of his chum with one arm, fastened his free hand in the net and waited for the climax that he felt could not be averted—the certain explosion that was to drop the *Cibola* to destruction and death.

CHAPTER XVI

LOST IN THE SKY

As Ned lay with eyes closed and hands clenched a swaying rope touched his face. Instantly he knew that it was the valve cord. He was powerless to grasp it. But, throwing up his head, he made one desperate effort to catch the line with his teeth. It had swung away and was lost in the darkness. Even in his desperation Ned wondered why Alan's opening of the valve had not caused the balloon to drop. As he thought, there was a new and sudden shock.

The wildly flying car almost stopped. There was a jerk as if it had struck some object. For a moment an unseen force seemed straining on it from the rear. Then, whirling on its axis, it fell into the center of its circular course, where, with the sickening motion of a spinning top, it trembled an instant, and then shot straight upward.

Almost paralyzed with new surprise, Ned could realize but one thing—the bridge was horizontal. Something extraordinary had happened. The circular motion had stopped, and the *Cibola*, with only a dying swirl, was free of the maelstrom of wind.

"We've been cast out of the vortex," was Ned's thought. Drawing Alan nearer the center of the bridge the boy threw himself down beside his unconscious friend and gasped for breath. Then he suddenly realized that the numbness of his hands was not wholly due to the now intense cold. He became conscious, too, that his quick and feeble breathing was not caused by exertion. The balloon had been thrown to a tremendous altitude. The rarefied atmosphere scarcely supported life.

With a new effort he leaned over Alan's prostrate form. The unconscious boy seemed hardly breathing. His face and hands were cold as ice.

Almost overcome, himself, Ned finally made his way with freezing limbs to the valve cord corner of the bridge. The rope was there. He reached for it with a despairing effort. But his chilled fingers would not close. With one more struggle he half rose, threw his stiffened arm about the cord, pressed it against his body and then fell senseless on Alan's cold form.

How long he was unconscious he did not know. When his senses came back the *Cibola* was again in the path of the storm. The straining ropes and the creaking car told him they were once more on their swift course to the southwest. But the horrible circular spin was gone, and he could breathe again. Before his unconscious body had

released the valve cord enough gas had escaped to save them. They had dropped thousands of feet—how far he could not even guess.

But he knew that he could breathe again and that, for a time at least, they were safe. His instant thought was of his chum. Crawling into the cabin for a water bottle and some blankets he could not resist a glance at the barometer. It showed that they were a little over 8,500 feet in the air. They had dropped nearly two miles. On the way back to Alan a new alarm came suddenly to Ned. He hesitated a moment, and then the thought of Alan's condition driving the idea from him, he hurried to the bridge. The rising temperature and the lower altitude had just aroused the unconscious boy and Ned found him partly in his senses again. A wet handkerchief on Alan's face and a warm blanket about his shoulders soon made the boy sensible of the situation.

Ned told him how the wind-spout had hurled them out of its terrific vortex and how he in falling unconscious had apparently held to the valve cord long enough to bring the *Cibola* to its present level.

"Why didn't it drop when I opened the valve?" asked Alan.

Ned's only explanation was: "The force of the

spout probably pulled us up in spite of our loss of gas, just as a maelstrom at sea will drag a vessel down to destruction."

"But after we were out of it, why didn't we stay up?" persisted Alan.

Ned answered. "If you hadn't been unconscious you wouldn't ask. Before we got well into that whirlwind we were 18,500 feet up. I don't doubt that the storm hurled us more than a mile higher. On a guess I'd say we were nearly 25,000 feet in the air. The temperature must have been down near zero. And you know you don't breathe well five miles above the earth. We had to come down."

"And where are we now?"

"Where?" answered Ned. "I don't know. But we're going southwest and the hurricane is still doing business. That's what I'm bothered about. I was just going to see what time it is."

Alan was able by this time to move himself and the boys made their way once more into the cabin. It was again inky dark and the balloon was driving on steadily and evenly like a ship under full sail.

"Two-thirty," exclaimed Alan, as Ned flashed the light.

"That makes six hours and thirty-five minutes since we started," said Ned. "At forty miles an

hour, and I think that is a fair estimate, we may be two hundred and eighty miles off our course."

Alan whistled. "It certainly does look as if we'd go back by train."

"I don't know," answered Ned doubtfully as he turned the flashlight on the sectional map of the southwest United States hanging just in front of the pilot wheel. "Two hundred and eighty miles southwest of the mesa puts us just over the most arid part of Arizona."

"Then what?" inquired Alan, peering over his shoulder.

"We shan't be able to make out the lay of the land beneath us until day breaks. That will be at six o'clock. Then we'll be over Mexico. If civilization isn't in sight we'll have to go on until we sight a town—"

"Mexico?" exclaimed Alan. "Why, I've never been out of the United States."

"You may make your first trip abroad, then, before breakfast," answered Ned with some of his old-time cheeriness.

After some further speculation on the desirability of making a landing as soon as it was light enough to make out the nature of the land beneath, the young aeronauts decided that each would take a short rest. The first watch fell to Ned. At half past four, as there was yet no less-

ening of the long continued storm and no sign of dawn, and the barometer still showed a little over eight thousand feet altitude, Ned wrapped himself in blankets and Alan took the second trick as lookout.

An hour and a half later he aroused Ned.

"It's just getting light," he explained.

"Can you make out anything yet?" asked Ned sleepily.

"Nothing but clouds," answered Alan.

"There's a gray stretch of them as far as you can see."

"And the wind?"

"Steady and strong as the Overland Express."

"Have we gone up?"

"Still at eight thousand feet."

Ned looked out of the pilot window. The sky of night had not yet begun to show pink, but there was a softening in the gloom that hinted of the coming day. The boys clambered to the bridge. For the first time in over nine hours they could make out the vague form of the *Cibola's* bulging bag. Rushing ahead of the car like a pulling sail it almost obscured a view of the sky above. Ned looked below. Like a carpet, a misty stretch of fog or clouds filled the circle of their horizon.

"Nine hours and a half," said Ned, after a

mental calculation. "That may mean four hundred miles. I think we'd better go down at once. You know the Gulf of California isn't far away."

"We haven't gone that far, have we?" exclaimed Alan anxiously.

"We don't want to," answered Ned. "And since we've got to lose more gas some time, we may as well do it now. Open the valve, a little at a time, and I'll watch the glass."

"Here she goes!" sang out Alan, as Ned made his way to the cabin and took his stand by the barometer. The *Cibola* responded with the speed that had marked its all-night course.

"Seven thousand feet," called out Ned. "Give her another pull."

The first soft glow of dawn shot up in the east and the heavy sky above began to take the form of overlapping banks of clouds.

"Six thousand—"

"Ned!" shouted Alan, before his chum could finish. "Here!"

There was alarm in Alan's voice, and Ned sprang up the ladder instantly. Alan was hanging over the protecting net of the bridge with his eyes fixed on the gray waste that stretched beneath them.

"What?"

But there was no need for an answer. The first pale streak of day told all.

"Water," exclaimed Alan springing back in consternation.

Ned took one sweeping glance around the horizon. There was not a break in the line.

"The sea," he added, "and out of sight of land."

The boys looked at each other helplessly.

"Do you think it is the Gulf of California?" whispered Alan with a tremor of alarm.

"It must be," replied Ned at last. "But that means we've gone faster than forty miles an hour."

Alan's voice strengthened under a sudden thought.

"But there's land on the other side," he exclaimed quickly.

"Yes," responded Ned, looking thoughtfully ahead and then behind. "But that body of water is not much over a hundred miles wide. There's no sign of shore here."

"What do you mean?" asked Alan, his voice dropping into a whisper again.

"I mean," answered Ned with plain anxiety in his tone, "that all our calculations may have been wrong. We may have been making over sixty miles an hour all night."

"And that—" began Alan nervously.

"We may be fifty miles or more at sea over the Pacific."

Almost speechless with alarm the two boys turned their eyes on the far-reaching water beneath. They were now no longer descending, but the sun was coming with a golden glow, and in the fast increasing light the foam crowned crests of high rolling waves were plain beneath them. Ned descended into the cabin and returned with the binoculars. After a long, careful sweep of the horizon he passed them to Alan.

"Not a sign," exclaimed Alan, when he had done the same. "Not even a distant peak."

"Well," remarked Ned as he took the glasses again, "we have one thing to be thankful for—the wind is going down."

It was true. With the first shaft of the sun the hurricane seemed to break.

"And when it grows calm enough," added Ned with some courage in his voice, "we ought not have much trouble in making land with our propeller. We can't be far from the shore at the worst."

With this assurance, the perplexed boys gave their whole thought to the wind. The angle of the support ropes was already much more acute. The big bag was now almost directly overhead, in-

dicating that the force of the wind was diminishing rapidly. At six o'clock day had broken into a glory of white and gold above and an endless roll of blue and green beneath.

"It's the Pacific, all right," commented Ned at last. "If it weren't we'd have made out land before this. Let's have a try with our engine. We don't want to go nearer Hawaii than we have to."

Eagerly enough the young aeronauts went below. The water in the cooling tank was found unfrozen, and stripping the protecting blankets from the tubes the boys made ready to start the engine. The gasoline and batteries were tested and found to be in good shape, and in another moment, with Alan at the crank, the long silent but perfectly adjusted engine was once more in motion. The velvety hum of its powerful cylinders was music to the ears of the young adventurers.

Ned took his stand on the pilot platform. While they had been drifting with the wind the rudder had been powerless. But, as soon as the friction clutch brought the great propeller into faster and faster motion, the car began to gain on the dying wind.

"Fine!" shouted Alan, thrusting his head through the side window to admire the wide sweep

of the white propeller arms. "Try a turn off the wind."

Very gently Ned tautened the guide wires on the loosely swinging rudder and then brought it slightly against the wind. The car, checking itself, wavered a moment and then responded.

"Here she goes," shouted Ned in his enthusiasm. "She's all right—she'll stand this breeze."

With a slow turn he brought the rudder hard down and the *Cibola* dipped to the right and downward. Before the car was fairly on the long swing there was a crash. Five hundred pounds of sand bags piled loosely on the floor of the cabin slipped forward, heaped themselves in a mass under the pilot platform and then, sinking through the thin spruce floor, plunged into the distant water beneath. Ned toppled backward from the platform, narrowly escaping the gap made in the floor by the lost ballast, and before he could recover himself the *Cibola* was bounding upward with a roar.

The terrific speed of the balloon was far too great to be checked by propeller or aeroplanes. As the car righted, Ned and Alan collected their thoughts, shut off the engine and climbed to the bridge above. Alan mechanically walked to the valve cord.

"Check her," ordered Ned, as he realized that the bag was rushing skyward at a fearful speed. "It may be all right higher and it may be all wrong. We may catch a high stratum of wind there. Open the valve!"

Alan reached for the cord when Ned stopped him with a shout.

"Wait," he cried; "I didn't think. It'll take a lot of gas to offset all those bags. Wait; perhaps we can't afford to lose it. We'll have to risk it for awhile."

And, as he feared—the *Cibola* ascending over a mile in two minutes—the car plunged almost at once into a stronger current, that again carried them rapidly westward. What was worse, the breeze was too strong for the *Cibola's* propeller. The boys were indeed in sore straits.

Again Ned took the binoculars. With the first sweep of them he paused, fixed them on a point almost directly in their path miles ahead and then handed the glasses to Alan.

"Looks like a ship—like a wreck," exclaimed Alan.

"It is," added Ned. "A three-masted vessel with the foremast gone."

They looked at each other significantly.

"It's good to see something, anyway," said Alan with a trace of hope in his voice.

"We'll go down," exclaimed Ned decisively, "at any cost."

With a quick movement in response Alan pulled the cord. With all the patience they could summon the youthful navigators awaited the result.

"A quarter of our gas has got to go out before we'll stop," remarked Ned after some minutes, "counting what we've already lost."

Meanwhile the *Cibola* raced forward toward the black hulk directly in its path.

"Do you make out any one aboard?" asked Alan, when Ned had again put the glasses on the wreck.

"Not a soul."

At this moment the *Cibola* wavered like a balanced scale, came to an instant's pause and then began to drift downward.

"Enough," shouted Ned. "Close her."

Alan released the cord. There was no response. The line lay loose in his hand.

"Close her," shouted Ned, springing forward and grasping the cord.

But it neither gave nor responded to his jerk.

The valve had caught, and the *Cibola* was already falling like a stone into the Pacific beneath.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DERELICT.

"The ballast or we're lost!"

As Ned shouted these words he sprang to the ladder. With a bound he was on the bridge slashing at the bags of precious sand tied to the netting. Alan, not slower, worked with frenzy at those on the opposite side. Three hundred pounds of sand disappeared overboard before the *Cibola* had fallen a thousand feet. The great bag wavered, and seemed to shake itself. Then there was a momentary rise.

"Is it enough?" exclaimed Alan panting.

"A ton isn't enough now," answered Ned quickly. "We are bound to fall. With that open," and he turned his blanched face upward toward the already flabby bag, "we can't hold out. Start the engine," he shouted.

Alan did not hesitate. He did not understand, but he acted. Then he understood. While he flew to the task Ned was busy behind him. The *Cibola*, after a little spring upward, was settling again. But now it was with an easy, almost imperceptible drift. The engine responded to the

crank and spark. Alan turned quickly. A great bundle had just disappeared over the bridge netting above. The prized Aztec mummy was hurtling toward the waves of the Pacific and eternal oblivion.

"Head for the wreck," ordered Ned sharply.

Alan sprang to the wheel again and threw on the clutch. As the propeller responded the prow of the dirigible lifted itself slightly and he could feel the *Cibola* leap forward with the wind. He also knew that the car was dropping lower each moment. Then there was another slight rebound. Ned had thrown the ammunition and supply chest through the hole in the floor—extra incandescent bulbs, cartridges, revolvers, the camera and like supplies had followed the mummy into the sea.

"The anchor must catch in the mast shrouds," panted Ned. "Head for them and I'll keep her afloat."

While Alan, his hands gripping the steering wheel, bent to this effort, he could hear Ned on the deck above. Despite the pull of the now swiftly flying propeller, the *Cibola* was settling fast. The fall and the onward flight of the balloon brought the wreck rapidly nearer. But the waves beneath seemed to be racing upward to meet them. Then there was another rebound.

The metal balloonet blower had been cast overboard.

The wreck now loomed big before them, perhaps a mile ahead, low in the water and rising and falling in the roll of the sea.

"The tool chest!" shouted Alan.

"Not yet," called Ned, as he dropped into the cabin and threw open the trap door in the floor. With desperate speed, taking advantage of their last respite, he dropped the twenty-five-foot rope ladder in place, snapped the suspended anchor onto the end of the three hundred-foot coiled up drag rope and swiftly slid the rope to its length beneath the car.

"The tool chest!" shouted Alan again. "Or we can't make it."

With a swift glance over Alan's shoulder Ned saw the wreck rise before them, not a thousand yards away.

"Keep her to it," he shouted in Alan's ear. "You'll do it."

At that instant it seemed as if the *Cibola* might reach the wreck on the angle of its fall, and hope sprang up in each boy's heart. The next moment this was dashed—the buoyancy gained by the loss of the blower was short lived. Again they were sinking rapidly.

"Why don't you drop the tool chest?" pleaded Alan again in despair.

"Because," exclaimed Ned stubbornly, "you can't make a boat with your hands."

"The box itself!" cried Alan.

Ned understood. With the energy born of necessity the tools were tumbled onto the floor and just as the anchor touched the water the iron-bound box was hurled through the breach in the bottom of the cabin. The craft sprang upward. But the rise was feeble. The forward pull of the engine alone seemed to be giving life to the balloon. Before the car began to sink again Ned made the quick calculation that one more lift in the air would probably carry them over the wreck. But that lift meant either water, gasoline or food. And any one of these might mean their future salvation. Small articles did not count. The sagging, flapping bag told that the end was near.

One thing only remained. Ned was hastily removing his shoes. Alan saw and started to leave the wheel.

"Stick to her—it's our salvation," exclaimed Ned. "Be game. We've got to save this car."

"What are you doing?" cried Alan as Ned shot out of his coat, trousers and shirt.

"Keep your nerve," answered Ned trying to

smile. "You only need one more lift. I'll give it to you."

"Stop," entreated Alan, as he saw his chum spring through the trap door and grasp the swaying rope ladder.

"If you don't bring her over the wreck we're both lost," came the firm answer from below.

Alan turned again to the forward window in anguish. The low hulk of the wreck rolled before him about five hundred yards ahead. But the bow of the *Cibola* seemed ready to plunge into the white topped waves now not over forty feet beneath. The spinning propeller fairly groaned at its task, but the drifting fall showed the certain end. Left to its own power, in another moment the *Cibola* must plunge into the sea a tangled mass of car, bag and cordage.

There was a splash below. The swinging ladder with Ned on the bottom rung had pounded against a wave.

"Stick to her, Alan!"

The white-faced boy at the wheel heard the words from below as if in a dream and then—the wobbling car sprang into the air once more—the last lift.

Ned had dropped into the sea.

The *Cibola* made its last bound. Alan turned cold as ice. Then desperation came to his aid.

He must save the car to save Ned. With one hand on the rudder wheel and the other on the aeroplanes he made his calculations. There was not even time to look for the nervy boy who had so gamely risked his life.

Although four or five hundred feet in the air the *Cibola* seemed now sustained more by the pull of its motive power than the gas in the almost collapsed bag. Before the bound upward came to an end Alan threw the aeroplanes down and the car dipped to its last fall. Nothing now could change its course. Less than five hundred feet ahead lay the wreck. The final moment had come. With a quick motion he threw off the propeller clutch and sprang through the trap door.

The wreck seemed almost beneath him. As Ned had, before him, he made his way quickly down the ladder. The water-logged hulk rose on the swell and seemed about to pass beneath him. The balloon, the last of its power gone, rolled heavily forward, held back only by the long drag rope now drawing slowly over the rail of the vessel.

Throwing himself backward Alan caught the taut drag rope, pulled the car to it and then, twisting himself about the line, released his hold on the ladder and shot like a weight to the lumberstrewn deck of the wreck beneath.

There was one slight rebound of the balloon as his feet struck the lumber. Bracing himself and with no consciousness of his blistered hands, Alan drew the *Cibola*, hand over hand, swiftly to the wave-washed deck. For a moment only he held to the framework of the car and then, as the long bag careened on its side, he knew that the *Cibola's* voyage was done.

Alan rushed to the mainmast shrouds on the windward side of the vessel. The black head of Ned was coming toward the wreck like the oily back of a porpoise. In a few minutes two eager hands grasped two tired, wet ones, and Ned was drawn on board the wreck, little the worse for his plunge. As the panting swimmer got his breath, he exclaimed:

“Who has the rabbit foot, old man?”

Alan, although happy enough to have Ned safely with him again, was in no condition for joking. He could only glance about with alarm.

“It’s almost under water,” he exclaimed, noticing the condition of the wreck.

Ned also looked around. “I guess we’ll float awhile yet—been floating some time, I reckon.”

“Come,” suggested Alan, “get your clothes on.” Then suddenly throwing his arm about his chum, he added: “You’re the only boy in the world who would have done what you did.”

Ned changed the subject at once.

"Afloat on a derelict!" he shouted. "Wrecked at sea, really and truly. Do you know," he added with mock seriousness, "that, next to finding buried treasure, this is a regular hummer. It's going to be the event of our lives."

"If we don't drown," interrupted Alan very soberly.

"Drown?" exclaimed Ned, as he began to put on his clothes. "I should say not. I tell you," he added with spirits bordering on gaiety, "we have a rabbit foot somewhere."

Alan grunted his disapproval of his chum's levity and then the boys were ready to look about. The wreck, her decks almost flush with the water, was wallowing heavily in the trough of the sea. What had been an immense deck-load of milled lumber had, in the main, been torn from its protecting chains and washed overboard. One tier of heavy pine boards yet held in place just forward of the mizzenmast. On this rested the car of the balloon, one end extending forward over the wave-washed deck and the other tilted slightly on the rail of the poop deck aft.

"What do you make of her?" Alan asked at last.

"She's the *Olivette* of San Francisco," Ned answered. "I suspect she was bound south. The

crew must have abandoned her in the blow last night—probably rescued by a passing steamer.”

In time they found that the vessel, a square-rigged bark, had sailed from Portland, bound for Guaymas in Mexico. What was left of her cargo on the deck indicated a hold full of the same material. This, although the water poured from the hawse pipes and scuppers with each roll of the wreck, accounted for the derelict's uncertain buoyancy.

Of the bark's three masts, the foremast had gone by the board, leaving a ragged stump about ten feet high. The main and mizzenmasts stood, their topmasts snapped off short at the mastheads. The deck rails had been swept away in long sections by the loose lumber, only that forward of the foremast being left intact. The wire stays and rigging of the bowsprit and jibboom streamed out at the sides of the vessel, scraps of jibs and staysails yet clinging to the halyards.

“She was carrying sail up to the moment the hurricane struck her,” exclaimed Ned, pointing to the mainsail flapping loosely from the broken yard. The forward deck had been swept clear of every movable object. Nothing but the capstan and anchor were left in place. After estimating the length of the bark at something less than two hundred feet and her register at about

seven hundred tons, the castaways made haste to examine the cabin on the deck astern.

Alan began to show an interest in the wreck. This part of the vessel was a reminder of the captain's quarters as they existed on old-fashioned full-rigged ships. Reaching from abaft the mizzenmast, and separated from it by a now broken and torn rail, a slightly elevated poop deck, ascended by two steps, rounded out the vessel aft. On this and extending to the wheel were the captain's cabin and the cook's galley. The skipper's cabin came first and it was this that made the boys almost forget their trying adventures and peril. The front of it, over-looking the forward decks, was of windows set in a semi-circle like a pilot house. Into this the storm had not penetrated and Ned threw himself on the half circular couch under the square ports with an exclamation of joy.

"What more do you want?" he cried in sudden exuberance. "A dry bunk, a ship to command and—" he sprang up and started astern—"something left in the kitchen, I hope."

Nor was he disappointed. Although all was confusion there, Ned and Alan in a few minutes found flour, potatoes, salt meat, the usual minor pantry supplies, and, what was yet better, the butt half full of fresh water.

"That reminds me," interrupted Alan, "I'm hungry. We haven't eaten for fifteen hours."

"I want sleep more than breakfast," replied Ned. "But I'll go you."

The boys made a hearty breakfast on the stores yet remaining in the balloon. When they had finished, the wind had settled into a steady breeze, the sun was high in a cloudless sky of blue and the storm-crowned swells of the sea were fast disappearing in the long, steady rolls of the blue-green Pacific.

"Now," exclaimed Ned, punching Alan playfully in the ribs, "you can do what you like. I'm going to turn in and sleep until I'm soaked full of it."

Ten minutes later both boys were far from thoughts of storm or wreck.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DISH OF LOBSCOUSE

When Alan half opened his sleepy eyes, about four o'clock in the afternoon, he could almost imagine himself lying under the old orchard trees on his uncle's farm at home. There was a summer softness in the air; there was a dreamy, gentle heave to the submerged bark, and a glance through the open port near-by showed a blue sky with fleecy, soft clouds almost unstirred by the wind.

The sound of distant droning came to him like the hum of bees. Then he knew that it was some one singing and he realized at the same time that Ned was no longer by his side. Arousing himself he listened.

“Oh! my name is Captain Kidd,
As I sailed,
As I sailed,
Oh! my name is Captain Kidd,
As I sailed;
Oh! my name is Captain Kidd,
And God's laws I did forbid
And right wickedly I did
As I sailed.”

Alan smiled. How often on long winter nights, when neither he nor Ned had even hopes of seeing the ocean, had he heard his adventure-loving and romantic minded chum hum that old buccaneer chanty! When they were not figuring on balloons and aeroplanes it was to the stories of the real adventurers of history that the two boys loved to turn. And among these no tales had interested them more than the annals of the bold navigators of the great South Sea on the bosom of which they had now been dropped from the clouds.

Then came another air:

“There’s pearls and gold
And wealth untold—
There’s ease for all
Where the South Seas fall.”

The smile that had been growing on Alan’s face broadened into a laugh. Springing from his bunk he hurried to the deck. There his laugh broke into a roar. High on the cross trees of the main-mast sat Ned, yelling his songs across the endless Pacific and costumed like a comic opera pirate. On his head was a dull red handkerchief, filched no doubt from some abandoned ditty bag; his pajama shirt was turned low at the neck in approved man o’ war style and his swinging bare feet protruded through the rolled up legs of his

light weight garments. Just above him, on the stump of the mast, fluttered the United States colors reversed. It was plain that Ned, arising ahead of Alan, had made it his first task to raise this flag of distress.

“Where the South Seas fall
There is ease for all.”

The resonant, happy voice of Ned rang out again.

“Hey, there,” exclaimed Alan. “I thought you were so anxious to get some sleep?”

Ned stopped short in his song and then, a little sheepishly and as if he had been caught stealing jam, slid quickly to the deck.

“How long have you been up and what are you doing?” continued his chum, laughing again at the lad’s theatrical make-up.

Ned took a hitch in his trousers and, assuming the role of a sailor, replied:

“I’ve been up an hour or so, snooping around.” Then twisting his face into a humorous expression he added: “Avast there, my hearty. You see it was this away: a seein’ as how we had scarce a shot left in our locker, as ye might say, and afeared that she might come on to blow afore mornin’ broke, I jist made free to take a turn with this ’ere flag in the way o’ a signal.”

“Couldn’t you get in something about a ‘slant

o' wind,' or 'making an offing'?" interrupted Alan, amused. "Both are old favorites of yours."

"I'll get them all in, never you fear," responded Ned cheerily. "But say, Alan,"—and happiness broke out in every line of his countenance—"isn't it great! I never imagined it would be half so pleasant to be lost at sea."

"Pleasant?" said Alan. "How do you make that out? What is to happen if we are not picked up in a day or so?"

"Isn't the cabin comfortable, and haven't we food and a stove and water?"

"But what about our friends waiting for us and the folks at home?"

Ned sobered. "That is bad," he said slowly. "But think what might have happened."

"And what if our wreck goes to pieces? They always do, you know, in sea stories."

"That's easy," replied Ned falling into his natural enthusiasm again. "We'll escape on our raft."

"Now, you're talking," interrupted Alan. "We must make a raft. All we need is nails. We have the timber and the tools and stuff for a sail—why don't we rig up a sail on the wreck?" he added quickly. "There is the balloon bag!"

"It would help," answered Ned. "But not much—the rudder's gone."

"Where do you think we are?" exclaimed Alan after taking a new look at the wide horizon.

Ned shook his head. "Off the coast of Lower California. How far off I haven't any idea. But we ought to be in the track of coast steamers."

Alan was looking over the tier of timber beneath his feet.

"I'm ready to start work on a raft," he exclaimed suddenly.

"Not today, mate," responded Ned. "I can't see any need to rush matters. Let's lark it a little while we can, my bucko. We'll just stow this 'ere balloon bag safe and snug and make our supplies shipshape and then I vote to get busy on that galley back there and boil potatoes and bake biscuits and fry meat!"

"I suppose one might as well," replied Alan slowly. "But I thought shipwrecked people lived on hardtack and water!"

"That's in the stories," answered Ned. "This is the real thing."

"Say," exclaimed Alan, as Ned hastened to the cabin deck. "What do you suppose Bob Russell would have said to this?"

Ned slapped his leg. "Isn't it a shame?" he exclaimed. "He certainly would have enjoyed it."

Alan shook his head. "Ned," he replied, catch-

ing his chum by the shoulders, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You are beginning to make me think we've been downright lucky. And just when I know we ought to be scared to pieces."

"Make tomorrow your worry day," shouted the irrepressible Ned. "Avast and belay! 'Oh! my name is Captain Kidd, as I sailed, as I sailed.' "

And, although Alan was convinced that they were wasting valuable time, both boys were soon busy in the mussed-up galley. The crew of the *Olivette* had apparently been rescued suddenly, for the pantry had been left fairly well stocked. After things had been put in something like order and a fire had been made in the range, Ned volunteered to become cook.

"If you are so anxious about starting a raft," suggested Ned, with a peculiar smile, "you can begin a search for nails. I'll cook the supper. But don't bother me while I'm at it," he added, abstractedly casting his eyes longingly at the pantry shelves. "I'll call you when it's ready."

This suited Alan. For over an hour neither boy molested the other. Alan searched the wreck for nails without success, and then busied himself laying out timber and collecting bits of cordage. About six o'clock there was a loud banging on an empty stew-pan and Ned, red of face and redo-

lent of the kitchen, with the odor of onions predominating, announced supper. There was a puzzled look on the cook's face as he led the interrupted raft designer into the captain's room.

"There she is," exclaimed Ned, with a little doubt in his voice, but a brave show of confidence.

In the middle of the table was a meat dish piled high with a dark pasty mess.

"What's this?" sniffed Alan, as the odor of scorched flour and onions greeted his nostrils.

"What is it?" snapped Ned scornfully. "Why, it's a regular sea dish. It's lobscouse."

"Lobscouse?" exclaimed Alan. "And what's 'lobscouse'?"

"Why, it's what old sea dogs eat. It's what they like above anything else. It beats steak. It's a wholesome, filling sea dish."

"Well, it certainly looks as if it would be filling," said Alan, trying to suppress a smile. "Let's have a sample."

Ned smacked a big spoon into the steaming mess and ladled a gigantic portion onto Alan's plate. Alan took a bit on his fork. Ned stopped him.

"You eat it with a spoon," he explained a little nervously.

"A spoon," cried Alan. "That? Why, you can almost cut it."

"Yes, I got it a little too thick," added Ned.
"But it's really a soup."

"All right," said Alan, exchanging his fork for a spoon. "Here goes!"

As if he were taking medicine, Alan lifted a spoonful to his mouth. Then his face grew red.

"It's burned," he sputtered.

"Burned?" repeated Ned in a disappointed tone.

"Yes, haven't you tasted it?"

"Not yet," answered Ned, a little guiltily.
"But maybe that's the bottom. Try the top."

Plunging his cook spoon again into the midst of the dish he ladled a second helping into another plate.

"Taste it yourself!" exclaimed Alan, shoving the plate toward Ned. The latter slowly complied. His face grew redder as he did so.

"It *is* a little scorched," he said finally.

Alan took another small spoonful.

"That's the best thing about it," he said at last.
"It disguises the taste."

Ned laughed outright.

"Maybe I didn't get it quite right," he explained. "I couldn't quite remember."

"Well," said Alan, "what's in it?"

"What's in it?" repeated Ned evasively.

"Yes. If I'm to eat it I want to know."

"I don't remember everything," confessed Ned.

Alan was picking over the dish with the point of his spoon. "Did you invent it?" he asked, looking up suddenly. "I thought we were going to have potatoes and pork for supper."

"They're in it—I remember them," acknowledged Ned.

"I can smell onions. There's no question about them," added Alan.

"And the succotash," added Ned. "A whole can."

"And this?" laughed Alan. "It looks like circus bill paste."

"Maybe I got in too much flour," suggested Ned. "But sailors aren't as finicky as you are."

"I'm not finicky. But if that's 'lobscouse' you can strike it off my bill of fare."

"And you won't eat it?" asked Ned persuasively.

"I will not!"

"Well," said the cook slowly, "I suppose lobscouse may be all right as a soup, but I don't care for it myself as an entree."

Slowly rising from the table Ned took the bowl of legendary sea food, walked out of the cabin to the deck rail and hurled the odoriferous lobscouse into the sea.

"Food for the whales," exclaimed Ned, half solemnly.

"Hardly," said Alan, who was now shaking with laughter. "Whales have no teeth."

"That's the last straw," shouted Ned, banging the spoon on the empty pan. "You can cook your own supper."

Just as night fell supper number two was served. But it included no nautical dishes. Alan, after discovering a few eggs, showed some skill in making a light batter and frying therein some thin slices of salt pork. Ned, capitulating, superintended the potatoes, to which he gave a crisp brownness that compensated for the fiasco of the lobscouse. With biscuits, tea, and a tin of preserved peaches for dessert, the boys ate themselves into forgetfulness of supper number one.

"And now," began Alan at last, when the cabin lantern began to throw long shadows through the darkening room, "I suppose you're only sorry that this isn't a 'long, low, rakish craft' with a black flag floating above?"

"Aren't you?" laughed Ned. "Tonight, at least? Remember:

" 'There's pearls and gold,
And wealth untold;
There's ease for all
Where the South Seas fall.' "

“Not for me,” replied Alan vigorously. “Enjoy it all you can, but all I see is an old scow ready to collapse, carrying two rattle-brained boys much too far from land.”

“Right on the track of the raciest buccaneers the world has ever known,” laughed Ned. “Alan,” he added, slapping his chum on the back, “for your years you’re the best mathematician I ever knew—and the worst poet.”

CHAPTER XIX

THE CIBOLA II

When Alan awoke the next morning he found that Ned had already risen. Peering hastily out of the window he detected his chum, fully dressed, leaning against the mainmast and gazing thoughtfully at the car of the *Cibola*.

"Still dreaming?" called Alan.

"Yes," came the answer. "Still dreaming."

In a few minutes Alan joined Ned.

"How about some breakfast and tackling the raft?" he began.

"Breakfast is all right," answered Ned slowly.

"But I've rather put the raft out of my mind."

"Perhaps you're thinking of walking?"

"No. I've been thinking of flying."

"Flying? Wake up! It's breakfast time."

Ned laughed, and, saying no more, made his way aft. At the galley Alan suddenly came to a stop.

"What is this about flying?" he exclaimed as if he had just concluded that the question might be worth asking.

"That's where dreaming comes in," said Ned, laughing softly. "I started romancing yester-

day, and last night, after we turned in, I couldn't stop. I had a big dream—but I was awake. We turned the *Cibola* into a flying machine."

"Are you joking?"

"Never more serious in my life. Look"—Ned grasped Alan with eagerness and drew him back toward the long skeleton-like balloon car. "I can't think of a thing needed in an airship that we can't get out of that car in some form or other; propeller, engine, cloth for guides, frame—"

"An aeroplane!" exclaimed Alan.

"Why not?" responded Ned.

"And fly ashore?" added Alan with alarm in his voice.

"Well," answered Ned slowly, "if she flew at all I think she'd make the land. We could try it."

Alan walked away and stood gazing silently into the blue east for some time.

"And you really think it can be made?" he said at last, turning around.

"Look for yourself," answered Ned, pointing toward the car.

"And you'd risk your life in it?"

"If it didn't go up we'd be right here in the water."

Alan took another moment for deep thought. Then he shook his head.

"Let's build the raft," he said at last.

"Surely," answered Ned with assurance. "And an airship, too. You make the raft and I'll work out an aeroplane."

"In the meantime," interrupted Alan, "if we happen to fall in with a passing vessel, I suppose you'll feel disappointed."

Ned's face was a puzzle. "No," he answered, "but if it's convenient, I certainly should like to try a flight before being rescued."

Breakfast that morning was postponed until 10 o'clock. Carried away at last by Ned's enthusiasm, Alan sat for over two hours listening to his explanation of the *Cibola's* possibilities. Long before the daring Ned was through outlining what he conceived might be done, Alan was convinced that it was at least worth trying. What at first seemed a hare-brained dream changed into a practicable plan so quickly that he temporarily postponed the beginning of the raft.

"I'll help you today," conceded Alan finally, as the castaways sat down to an omelet and some coffee, "but when you have a start I'm going to make a raft to pick you up."

Ned's first ideas were brilliant, but they were generalities. As soon as breakfast was over he made another long survey of the car and then the boys retired to the captain's cabin, cleared the

table, and with scraps of paper and stubs of pencils went to work. The size of every timber, the location of every brace and the character of every bolt, nut, screw and bit of machinery in the *Cibola* was as well known to each boy as the contents of his pockets. The car was made up of seven sections. The center one, in which the engine was placed, and which served as a cabin, was 6.12 feet long and 6 feet high—smaller than the others, for the sake of rigidity. One end of this section had a raised hood two feet in height which served as a pilot lookout. The entire length of the car was 54.12 feet. Therefore, the other six sections were each 8 feet long. The height of these sections varied from 6 feet at the cabin section to 5 feet at the extreme ends.

The body of the aeroplane was to consist of the car as it stood with the end sections cut off. The top frames of the end sections were to be utilized to make the superimposed horizontal planes carried in front of the airship to guide and balance it. Here the first hitch was encountered. The rear of these planes, on a 38.12 foot aeroplane would have to be nearly 10 feet from the car (Alan calculated 9.8 feet) and they would have to be directly and absolutely controllable from the car.

The absence of light timber suitable for a

framework to carry these guides was met by a plan to use the side aeroplane guides. And this steering apparatus also furnished a control for the superimposed planes. Each arm of the aeroplane guides was 10 feet long and was made of a long loop of vanadium steel, braced transversely, and covered with vulcanized silk. These arms, bolted to a shaft which ran through the cabin, were moved up or down by means of a lever. This shaft was at once selected as the basis for the new forward guide of the airship, as the long loops, unbolted, could easily be turned into a truss to hold the guide.

The Pacific continued beautifully calm. At noon so interested were the boys in their work that they abandoned luncheon. Their plans were made. The preliminary work was the disconnecting of the support ropes, the removal of the rudder, aeroplanes and propeller; the stowing away of the *Cibola's* bag, instruments, supplies and—most important of all—the extra gasoline, and finally the disconnecting of the engine, dynamo, cooling tubes and shafting.

The plan for getting the proposed car into flight was perhaps the most ingenious of the ideas discovered.

"I couldn't make any headway until I figured that out," explained Ned, when they began their

figuring. "And I think my suggestion will do the business. Our engine is a powerful one and our propeller has demonstrated that it can push quite a load. But both of them can't lift us. We've got to have a running start, so as to sail like a bird. We can't get much of a run at the best, but with our engine, especially if we could get a bit of breeze against us, I think my plan will work out."

The scheme was to build the aeroplane on the rails just forward of the foremast. The deck here was a trifle over thirty feet wide. All forward to the bowsprit was clear, the capstan standing just below the level of the rails. A block and tackle were to be rigged on the bowsprit as far out as the strain would permit and, when the car was ready, the anchor was to be drawn around the bow with the aid of the capstan, raised to the block and held there with a slip knot. From each end of the car ropes were to extend to a single line which passed over a simple pulley next to the anchor blocks. The young aeronauts had already discovered a can of calking grease in the galley. With a good coat of this on the smooth rails, the heavy weight, when the slip knot holding the anchor was released, would plunge into the sea and the aeroplane would shoot forward like a bird.

"There's nearly forty feet of clear track there,"

explained Ned, "and, with our propeller going at top speed, if we don't get a fine start it will be for some other reason."

"Yes," interrupted Alan a little dubiously, "that may start us. But how are you going to get loose when we've gone the forty feet?"

"Simple," exclaimed Ned. "You'll be sitting in the car with the ends of the guide ropes in your grip. The instant we get free of the rails you'll let go. The loose ends will fly around the up-rights behind which they have been passed and we'll be off."

When the sun was just overhead the work of converting the balloon into an aeroplane began. When the car had been stripped of its contents and the cabin covering had been removed the long skeleton of wood and wire was light enough for the boys to move it to its new position, and it was soon stretching bridge-like from rail to rail. This portion of the deck was free of timber and nearly always awash with the spray of gently breaking waves. But, barefooted and stripped to their undershirts, the castaways made light of such matters.

As the foundation of their new machine settled snugly into place it was made fast with a turn of some of the cordage Alan had collected, and the boys paused for breath. Ned's face was aglow

with enthusiasm. Suddenly he ran forward to the bowsprit, jumped on it and removing his cap repeated, dramatically:

“Oh! the palms grow high in *Aves*,
And fruits, they shine like gold;
And the colibris and parrots
They were gorgeous to behold.”

“What’s ‘colibris’?” sniffed Alan.

“I don’t know, but it sounds well,” laughed Ned.

“And ‘*Aves*’?”

“Oh,” answered Ned, “it’s somewhere in the land to be; where dreams come true, I guess.”

“That shows your ignorance,” retorted Alan quickly. “It’s an island in the West Indies. And if you think we are drifting there you’re mistaken.”

“But we’re not going to drift,” shouted Ned, splashing his feet in the cooling salt spray. “We’re going to fly.”

Alan turned away. “I’ll help build an aeroplane,” he said sharply, “if you’ll get to work and quit spouting about colibris and parrots and palms. You’d better be humping yourself about bolts and monkey wrenches.”

“Well, our first ‘hump,’” answered Ned, apparently undisturbed by Alan’s admonition, “will

be to 'hump' the top and bottom of our aeroplane skeleton. Of course we'll use silk strips from the balloon bag to cover our big planes, but since they can't be flat we'll have to arch each surface. As the curve will be one in fourteen the height of our arch will be just short of seven inches."

That was the first real work, and, in the end, the most difficult task the boys had set themselves. If there were any tools on the *Olivette*, they were to be found in the hold, and since the water was flush with the deck no investigation was possible there. From the deck timber strips might easily have been made with a rip saw, but with the small cross-cut saw in Ned's tool collection this was impracticable. An experiment was made with the "beading" from the aft cabin. But it was old and where it wasn't brittle it was rotten. After several hours of patient search and thought the idea of the curved surfaces had to be abandoned.

"We'll simply elevate the center and run the cloth to the frame on an angle," said Ned at last. "I've never heard of it being done, but it may work."

By night this part of the work was done. Light seven-inch blocks of pine were sawed from the wreck's cargo and one of these was nailed to the center of each cross-piece of the car. The soft copper wire that had been treasured so carefully

now came into use. Making fast the wire on one of the end bottom cross-pieces the boys carried it to the piece above, passed it over the block and so to the other end of the car, where, after they had made it taut they fastened it again to the bottom of the framework. A similar wire was run along over blocks on the bottom cross-pieces except at the middle section, where it was dropped down under the framework to escape the engine room.

Ned was too tired to do much skylarking that night. They had a good supper of pancakes, syrup, stewed evaporated fruit and tea. After supper a little breeze sprang up and when it was wholly dark the boys were glad enough to light the big lamp and drowsily seek the warmth of the cabin. Ned had got out a pile of the fine Italian hemp cords that had been used to attach the *Cibola's* bag to the car, and the boys were soon busy unraveling strands. The strings thus obtained were to be used in attaching the cloth to the top and bottom of the aeroplane.

About ten o'clock Ned threw down his work, caught up a soiled old chart of the Pacific—one of the *Olivette's* small supply—and spreading it out on the cabin table began to study it. Alan, arose and stood by him.

“Are you going to break out again?” asked Alan.

"I'm looking for Juan Fernandez Island," answered Ned demurely.

"Now it's Robinson Crusoe," exclaimed Alan, "and caves! I'll tell you what you do. If you're tired enough to quit work, you go right over to that bunk and turn in and do what dreaming you have on hand while you're asleep." So saying, he took hold of the map as if to put it away. And then, forgetting himself, he looked at it a moment, and spread it out once more on the table.

"Say, Ned," he exclaimed, "where do you reckon we are—on this chart, I mean?"

Ned laughed. "Not near Robinson Crusoe's island," he answered; "but we can't be far from here," and he indicated a point almost west and a little north of Point Natividad on the coast of lower California. "I don't know how far at sea we are, but we are not moving very rapidly—perhaps we are a hundred and fifty miles from land."

Alan drew a straight line from Ned's estimated point to the nearest land. It cut across Cerros Island, which lies at the head of Viscaino Bay.

"If we could get that far—" he began.

"Why, we'd starve to death if the Indians didn't make that unnecessary," broke in Ned. "Do the job right while you're at it."

He continued the line across the great penin-

sula and the wide gulf beyond and ended it at Guaymas in Mexico.

"That's the place to head for," he added. "That means white people, hotels, telegraph and railroads."

Alan thought a long time and then moved his head as if in half protest.

"There is a lot of water between here and there," he said at last.

For answer Ned walked to the chest beneath the cabin window and took out a cork life preserver jacket.

"There," he said, laughing and laying it in Alan's lap. "You can wear this. Now go to bed and forget your troubles."

CHAPTER XX

NED NAPIER'S INGENUITY

At about three o'clock in the afternoon of the tenth day after the *Cibola* fell on the deck of the derelict *Olivette*, Ned and Alan finished their great work. The *Cibola II* was ready for flight, or for an attempt at it. The great propeller had already been tested. At half revolution it shook the light silken-topped car and tugged at the stay ropes until the safety of the frame seemed endangered.

The construction of the airship had been prolonged because Ned, realizing the wisdom of Alan's persistent argument, had finally suspended the work long enough to lash together a raft. This they had begun on a day when clouds suddenly appeared and thick weather indicated that the Pacific skies were not always blue. Loose bolts were not hard to find on the *Olivette* and with these and an auger two twelve-foot squares of milled pine were constructed.

Clearing a space amidships one of these frames was laid on two two-inch boards to raise it above the deck, and then, four deep, the square was covered with long, smooth planks. When eight

inches of these had been stacked on the lower frame the other square was laid on top and then each stack of four boards was lashed fast to the upper and lower frames through spaces left for that purpose.

To the center of the raft two chests from the cabin of the *Olivette* had also been made fast by ropes passed through their handles and between the open planks below. And at one end of these a water keg had been lashed. The tips of two broken spars, with plenty of cordage and a large section of the *Cibola's* bag, were also on the raft for use in raising a sail. One of the chests was set apart for clothing, blankets, instruments from the *Cibola's* cabin, candles, a lantern, charts, tools and such other articles as were available and might be needed. Into the second chest went such food supplies as were left in the *Olivette's* lazarette. These included a few potatoes, a fair lot of canned goods, a small cask of pork, and some bacon and flour.

When the boys turned in at about eleven o'clock that night—and, as it happened, for the last time on the *Olivette*—the moon, which had shown so brilliantly each night, was low in the west and glowing faintly as if in a fog. Dark, thin clouds were breaking and forming quickly again and hurrying eastward. Little whitecaps were racing

before a light wind and the long calm of the ocean had given way to short, sharp waves which pounded the side of the wreck like hammers. These indications were not assuring, but they were not particularly alarming, and the exhausted boys sought their bunks with no special apprehension.

The following morning, to their surprise and relief, brought a calm. But the sun was obscured and there was a hint of chill in the air. The light sea of the night before had gone down.

"Things don't look good to me," Alan suggested as he gazed over the long reach of gray water. Nor did they to Ned, who missed the inspiring effect of the brilliant sunshine, and whose spirits were a little dampened at seeing the usually clean cut horizon line lost in a haze of low lying clouds.

"Cheer up!" he exclaimed with well assumed confidence, "your raft is all ready."

"And how about your aeroplane?" added Alan, looking at their realized dream with no little pride. "I'll say this at least; I'm proud of its architect."

"And I'm proud of the architecture," said Ned. "Not only because it looks pretty, but *because it will fly.*"

"I'd like to have it down on the sand dunes of

Lake Michigan," answered Alan. Then he looked away over the endless gray of the ocean. "But—" and he shook his head.

The roof and floor of the *Cibola II* rose in their thirty-eight-foot golden silk lengths like the low comb of a house. The coverings were not made fast in the evenest manner, but they were tight and had been made secure beneath a close twist of running cord. In front, the superimposed horizontal planes—for vertical guiding—stretched out like the yellow beak of some long-necked bird. These were carried at the extremity of a truss made of the braced aeroplane frames. Two lengths of spruce from the abandoned sections braced these light extended arms.

The lever by which the old aeroplane shaft had been controlled was yet in place by the vertical guides. It was now connected with the operating section of the airship, by means of a stiff stick of wood that had been sawed laboriously from deck planking. This was bolted to a short, improvised lever hinged to the front brace of the car.

The construction of the front guide and the truss to carry it had not been difficult, the steel loops of the old aeroplane guides fitting into place almost as if they had been measured for it. But the two parallel planes in the rear had taxed Ned's ingenuity. The result, however, though

crude looking, was convincing testimony of the young aeronaut's inventive resources.

"You can't do it," Alan had insisted. "The propeller must go directly in the rear of the center of the car and the wheel has a twelve-foot revolution. Where are you going to fasten a frame to carry your two rudders? You can't do it."

"But it must be done," answered Ned, "or we shan't have a flying machine."

An evening of planning and an entire day of labor had been devoted to solving this riddle. It was plain that a bridge-like truss must extend from the main car. The upper arms of this, to reach around the space in which the propeller must revolve and extend eight feet in the rear, must be not less than nine feet ten inches long. After it had been almost decided that these could be secured only by laboriously sawing another two pieces from the two-inch green pine timbers of the cargo, Ned unexpectedly discovered the very material needed.

Of the wrecked small boats still on the davits, one had been recently repaired. It was a sixteen-foot boat and two new cypress gunwales, two and a half by one and a half inches in size, were yet intact, attached to the bottomless shell. Almost two feet of one end of each of these was useless

by reason of saw slits in it to permit of a curve along the boat's bow; but when the gunwales were removed the boys had two curved pieces, sound and admirably suited to the purpose—much better than even straight pieces.

One end of each of these was mortised to the upper rear frame of the big car three and one half feet outside the upright laterals of the middle section. The abandoned sections of the car afforded eight pieces of spruce each eight feet long. Two were braced against the lower frame of the car, with their other ends fitting into slight notches half way out on the nine-foot arms. From the ends of the long arms the five-by-six-foot frame carrying the vertical rudders was suspended. To secure rigidity two more eight-foot pieces of the old sections were extended from the bottom of the vertical rudder frame forward to the other eight-foot braces where they were made fast.

The two vertical rudders were formed from the five-by-ten-foot rudder of the old *Cibola*. This silk-covered steel frame, cut in the middle, afforded two five-by-five-foot planes which were mounted four feet apart in a light frame six feet high and five feet wide. The ingenious truss holding this frame was not more novel than the contrivance to operate the rudders.

Since the chain gear operating the propeller

was but four feet long it was necessary to keep the new shaft bearings for this wheel not over four feet above the engine base. This located the center of the propeller four feet above the lower framework of the car and dropped the ends of the propeller, when revolving, two feet beneath the car bottom.

When this was discovered Alan was not a little concerned.

"You can't do that," he argued. "The first time we come down we'll tear the wheel to pieces."

Ned smiled. "That's true," he answered, "and it's bad mechanics. We should have six feet of gear chain and the end of the propeller should turn flush with the car bottom at least. But we haven't the chain. We must be original. The wheel will go smash the first time we come down, but we are not coming down but once. And that is going to be on the land. When we get there our flying will be over."

This being Ned's determination, he constructed the apparatus to move the vertical rudders to work *around* the propeller, instead of having it operate directly, as in the mechanism to throw the forward rudders. The eyelets that guided the rudder wires on the old *Cibola* were inserted at intervals along the rear truss braces and through these the steel rudder wires used on the balloon

were passed and made fast to the rudder wheel yet in place in the cabin. Light spruce pieces were attached to the faces of the vertical rudder planes with free ends extending about twelve inches toward the car. To these the rudder wire was made fast and in this manner a movement of the rudder wheel gave a corresponding motion to the planes behind.

"The forward and aft rudders should work together," explained Ned with regret, "but, since we can't have that, I'm sure we can work them separately. Anyway, there are to be two of us to try it, and that means some advantage."

"But," he added with some pride, "that is only the new application of a common idea. Where we have really accomplished something is in our automatic compensating device. I think that is a discovery and I shall try to patent it when we get back home again."

"When we do!" exclaimed Alan, a little pessimistically looking over the sullen expanse of dark heaving water.

"Cheer up!" broke in Ned. "This is the very thing that is going to take us back."

The problem that Ned was attempting to solve was this:

Nothing is so unstable as the atmosphere; air that often seems to be as calm as a mill pond, or

winds that appear to be as steady and fixed as flowing streams, are in reality often nothing more than invisible conflicts of twisting currents, eddying whirls and corkscrewing billows. A bird in its flight constantly allows for variations in wind velocities by readjusting the tips of its wings. Should a sudden gust of wind turn the flying bird downward the wing tips immediately twist into a new angle. If the bird is falling to the right, the tip on that side flattens out at a greater angle and the tip on the left closes in on a sharper angle.

"For which reason," explained Ned, "we'll never have flying machines that can be operated by those who are not trained aviators, until these readjustments are done automatically. And, as we are not Farmans or Wright Brothers we must make a self-acting apparatus."

Ned's compensating planes or wing tips were made of one-half of the lower frame of each of the discarded end sections. These, covered with silk, were attached to each end of the "roof" of the aeroplane, by means of the hinges taken from the bridge and cabin trap doors. Allowing each wing tip to incline slightly downward Ned fixed the two planes in place with pieces of semi-circular springs of steel wedged in between a cross arm of the tip and the cross brace on the end of the

car. These springs were the halves of the hoop of five-eighths-inch steel to which the escape valve of the *Cibola* had been attached.

After the springs had been made fast the wings responded to the slightest downward pressure, and then, the pressure removed, flew instantly back into place. Then came the devising of a method of operating the wings which, when worked out, was Ned's patentable "automatic compensation balance for aeroplanes."

On the dirigible there had been a compensating balance consisting of a grooved track, a good deal like the rail of a traveling hay fork, on which a thirty-five pound weight could be moved forward or aft with light wires extending to pulleys at each end of the car and ending at the pilot platform in the cabin. This rail was now removed and a portion of it 6.12 feet long was attached immediately beneath the cabin floor. After each end of this section had been closed the thirty-five pound weight, its bearings having been carefully cleaned and then freely greased, was free to run back and forth as the car tipped to the right or left. The gravity weight was carefully adjusted in the center of the track, and cords were run from it to the far tips of the balancing planes.

"Now," explained Ned with the enthusiasm of an inventor, "we can go to sleep and the 'compen-

sator' will do the rest. If we dip to the right the weight must slide to the right from gravity. And it can't do it without pulling down the tip on the left. When we get on a level the weight must run back and the wing will fly back into place. How do you like it?"

"Fine," responded Alan. "But—if I ever go up in that thing—you can bet I'll not take a chance on sleeping."

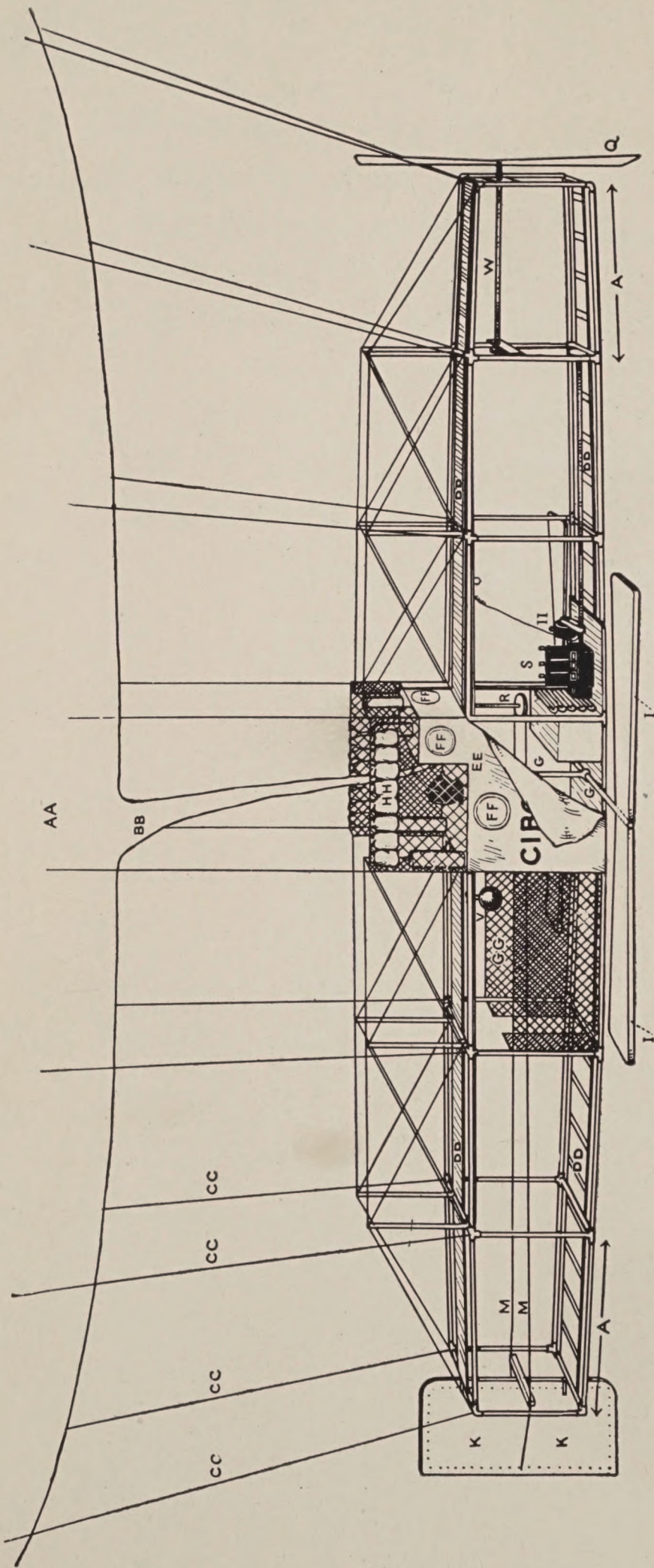


Diagram of Dirigible Airship "Cibola"

(These key letters refer to above Diagram only)

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-----------------|
| AA—Balloon bag of Dirigible | DD—Runways | GG—Store-room |
| BB—Inflation tube | EE—Cabin | HH—Ballast bags |
| CC—Car support ropes | FF—Lookouts | II—Light motor |

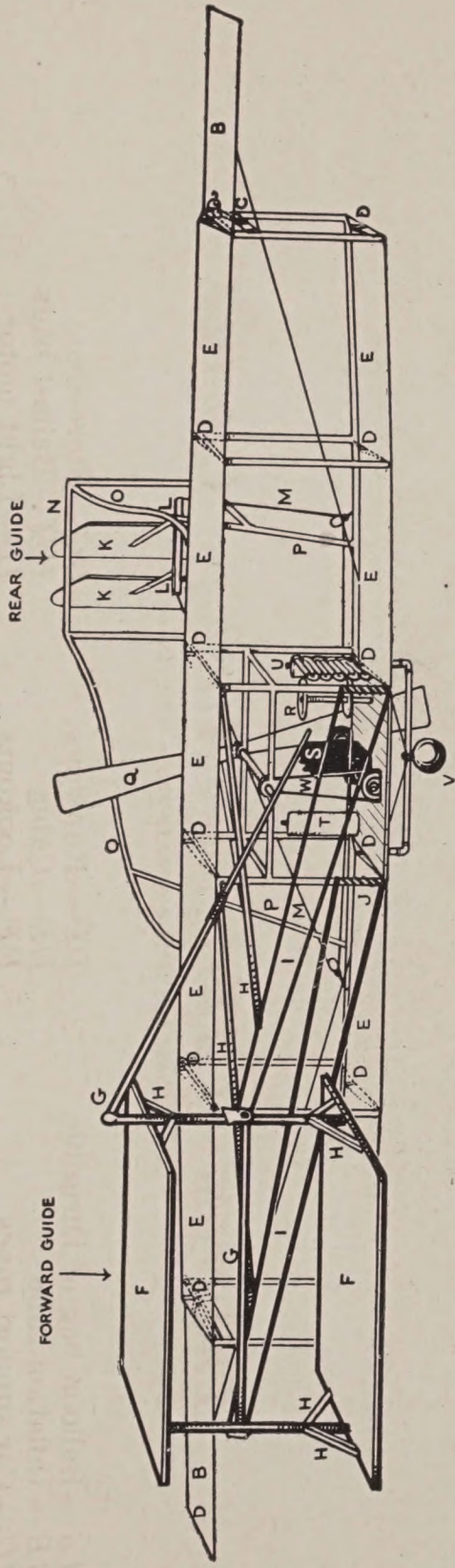


Diagram of Aeroplane made from Dirigible

(These key letters refer to both Diagrams)

- A*—End sections of Dirigible cut off to make shorter frame for Aeroplane.
- B*—Wings on ends of Aero-plane (tops of end sections of Dirigible covered with silk).
- C*—Spring for wings made from valve rim cut in two.
- D*—Small blocks fastened on top of cross-pieces of frame for wires to hold covering.
- E*—Silk covering over frame of Aeroplane (cut from balloon bag).
- F*—Parallel planes forward of Aeroplane, to guide upward and downward movements. Made from bottoms of end sections of Dirigible and covered with silk.
- G*—Lever and shaft for control of parallel planes. These are the lever and shaft of aero-plane guides of Dirigible.
- H*—Braces.
- I*—Truss for parallel planes (arms of aeroplanes on Dirigible).
- J*—Lashings holding truss to Aeroplane frame.
- K*—Rear guides for direction of Aeroplane. Made from rudder of Dirigible, cut in two sections.
- L*—Guide arm for control wires.
- M*—Control wires for rear guides.
- N*—Frame for rear guides.
- O*—Truss arms from Aero-plane to rear guides. Made from gunwales of small boat on derelict.
- P*—Rear truss braces.
- Q*—Propellor.
- R*—Steering wheel.
- S*—Engine.
- T*—Gasoline tank.
- U*—Cooling coils.
- V*—Balance device.
- W*—Propellor shaft and gear.

CHAPTER XXI

A STRANGE COLLISION.

It was the night of October 26. In the cabin of the *Olivette* the swinging lamp was turned low, and Ned was asleep in his bunk. Behind the light and casting black grotesque shadows on the cabin wall, swung, as the derelict rolled, the strange sneering idol found on the Treasure Mesa. There it had been hanging for ten days, a constant reminder to the young adventurers of the other wonders taken from the khiva of the temple.

“Ned!”

The cabin door flew open and Alan, his coat collar turned up and his face damp from the spray of windless waves, sprang into the cabin. The ship clock on the wall pointed to twelve minutes after nine o'clock.

“Ned,” shouted Alan again. “There’s a boat or something in the west.”

That night, for the first time, the boys had decided to stand watches; and the first trick had fallen to Alan. All day there had been a premonition of something unusual. Dark clouds without wind; a long, heaving, greasy sea; a dim

sun sinking into a bricky west, all hinted of a storm. The raft, stocked with supplies, lay ready to float in case the *Olivette* should go to pieces.

The *Cibola II*, complete in every detail, lay on the rails ready for launching. Its engine, with tanks full of gasoline, stood ready to start at any moment. Swaying on the bowsprit was the heavy anchor that was to shoot it forward and upward on its first flight. One thing was not aboard—the provisions. The conservative Alan insisted that they should be kept on the raft. On this a spar had already been raised, from the top of which hung a brightly burning lantern.

“A boat?” queried Ned drowsily. Then, clad only in his pajamas, he hastened to the deck with Alan.

“I can’t make it out,” explained Alan excitedly. “But it was something rushing through the water not far away.”

“Did it show a light?” Ned asked.

“No. But it cut through the water like a steamer bow and I heard an exhaust like steam blowing off.”

“Strange,” commented Ned, puzzled. “Keep a sharp lookout.”

While he hastened to get into his clothes he tried to imagine what the strange object might be. In eleven days they had not sighted a sail

and only once had they made out the low-lying smoke of a steamer far to the east.

Ned was just tying his last shoe when Alan's sharp cry again rang out:

"Here it is! Quick!"

Ned sprang forward, catching up his coat and cap, but before he could reach the door there was a crash; the light and the suspended idol swung forward violently and Ned, thrown from his feet, plunged against the cabin wall. With a cut in his forehead he scrambled to his feet. As he made his way blindly to the deck a thin sheet of water drenched his feet.

"Hurry!"

It was Alan's alarmed voice. Turning in the direction of it Ned found his chum on his knees and hanging onto the poop deck rail just forward of the cabin. The derelict was rocking and trembling as from some terrific impact. The entire main deck was awash with tons of water. As Ned sprang forward he felt the water at his feet subside; then, reaching Alan's side, he found him drenched to the skin and trembling with alarm.

"It hit us!" exclaimed Alan huskily.

"What?" shouted Ned. There was no sign of anything in the black gloom and no sound but the groaning of the creaking *Olivette* and the hollow suck of receding water.

Before either boy could speak again the vessel suddenly heaved as if a volcano had struck the wreck, and then careened violently. Ned and Alan were hurled flat on the deck. Then, with a terrific explosion, a geyser-like column of water arose from the side of the submerged bark. It fell in a sweeping deluge of spray, and the prostrate boys hurled themselves to the rail to escape being carried overboard in the hot embrace of the heavy liquid.

Clearing his face of the thick smother Ned grasped Alan's shoulder.

"A whale!" he shouted. "We're done for!"

As the *Olivette* feebly righted herself a new deluge of water rolled over the deck, and Ned and Alan sprang up in fresh alarm. The light of their raft had risen quickly in the air, as if swung by some unseen and mysterious force, and then, with a long, sweeping motion, it and the raft had slid out to sea. The castaways, waist deep in water, rushed forward, but they were too late.

The leviathan, head on, had plunged against the derelict amidships. For a moment the monster had been held by the wreckage and then, spouting its life blood in the deluge that had almost drowned the two boys, it had torn itself loose. Through the gap it had made in the side of the wreck rolled a second wall of water. And

on this, as it rushed back again into the sea, the carefully prepared raft, with all its equipment and its store of food, had disappeared in the receding billows.

Alan gave a cry of despair.

"We are lost!" he exclaimed. "The wreck is sinking."

The light on the raft reappeared on a swell a hundred yards away and then again disappeared.

"We've got to swim for it," Alan shouted as his eyes followed the fast disappearing beacon. "Come on—we can make it!"

Ned caught Alan by both shoulders to restrain him. He was trembling with excitement himself, but he had not lost his head. Although the avalanche of water swept aboard by the whale had subsided, he knew that the wreck was doomed. Six inches of water still flowed over the deck amidships where they stood and he knew that the bark was swiftly settling to its long postponed doom.

"We can't swim that distance," he shouted in Alan's ears, "and we're not going to try it."

He reached into his pocket and took out his knife. Thrusting it into Alan's cold fingers he added, sharply:

"Hurry forward and cut those lashings."

Alan sprang back as if he had been struck.

"It's fly now or drown," exclaimed Ned. "We have no choice. She'll sink in three minutes."

As Alan still hesitated Ned pushed him forward.

"You haven't any choice," cried Ned. "Cut away those lashings. Make them all clear. Hurry."

Alan, as if hypnotized, hesitating no longer sprang forward in the dark and Ned hastened aft to the cabin. Even as they did so both heard a new crash. It was a part of the hold cargo slipping out through the rent in the wreck's side. And both knew that the waves of the Pacific had taken its place. But Alan, feverishly swift at last, had hardly felt his way to the lashings at one end of the aeroplane before Ned reappeared. In his hand was the cabin lamp. Under his free arm was a dark object.

By the feeble rays of the light it was only too apparent that the end had come. The timber of the cargo that had littered up the middle deck was gone. The side of the wreck where the whale had struck was open to the sea. The rail and ten feet of the deck had disappeared. Each incoming surge washed higher and higher and Ned made his way forward through a full foot of water. Placing the dark object he carried in the cabin of the airship, Ned ran to the bowsprit.

With the aid of the light he made a quick examination of the block and ropes holding the anchor, and then swiftly readjusted the cables connecting them with the car. When he had finished he found Alan, pale but resolute, standing before the car.

"All clear!" exclaimed Alan. His voice was strained but firm.

"Now you're talking," answered Ned. "Climb aboard."

Ned made another hasty trip to the ends of the car to make sure, with the aid of the lamp, that the stay cables were all free. As he did so he felt a ripple of water on his feet. Until that moment the forward deck had been above water. He knew that they had done all they could. It was now fly or swim. Rushing forward he found Alan still on the deck.

"Ned," exclaimed Alan in a whisper, "I can't help it—I'd rather try to swim. There, see!" he cried tremulously pointing westward. Ned made out the fading light of the receding raft. He hesitated a moment. He well realized the peril into which he was about to throw himself and Alan, but he also had enough confidence in the craft they had built to believe that the chance was worth taking.

A gurgle of long imprisoned air rushed from the hold of the sinking *Olivette* with a warning

sound, and a wash of water ran to the shoe tops of the hesitating boys.

Spurred on by new determination Ned held the lamp before Alan's white face.

"Alan," he exclaimed in a low voice, "if ever you took my advice take it now. Listen," he exclaimed. "If we fly at all we'll make it. If we don't fly we can only fall. If we fall then we'll swim."

"Will you head her for the raft?" broke in Alan quickly as that possibility flashed on him.

"I'll do whatever you say," hastily answered Ned.

The next moment Alan was in the engine section of the car. Ned passed him the lamp and then threw himself upward with the agility of an acrobat.

"The starting ropes," he shouted.

They were in place. Reaching for them Alan stumbled over an object on the floor. Ned sprang forward and caught it up.

"While we have a light," he exclaimed, out of breath, "I'll just make it safe."

And while Alan braced himself with his feet against the forward frame of the car to make taut the starting ropes Ned again quickly suspended the precious idol from the upper front framework of the engine section.

The decisive moment had been reached. Ned gave the fly wheel a crank and the well tested engine sprang into life once more. It was a happy sound to the boys. But did it mean safety or a plunge into the black waves before them? Adjusting the lever operating the forward guiding planes Ned took his place on the car to give balance, reached for the cord that was to slip the anchor, and threw the propeller clutch.

He could feel Alan straining on the lines connecting the car with the anchor whose drop was to start them skyward.

"Remember," cautioned Ned. "Look out for the jerk, but don't let go until we reach the bowsprit. And then, don't move until I give the word—we are on a balance now."

The big twelve-foot propeller was beginning to turn like the screw of a liner. The waiting boys could feel the cool night air rushing by them. As the speed of the wheel increased the car began to tremble. Faster and faster, as Ned moved the gear clutch, spun the humming yellow blades behind them—800 revolutions. The car was pushing forward on its front base. At 1,000 turns a minute the skeleton framework rose and jumped forward an inch or two.

"Now!" shouted Ned.

Biting his lips, trembling with excitement, the

daring boy threw the clutch to full speed—1,400 revolutions a minute. The silken-clad air craft felt the thrust and sprang forward, as if about to mount skyward of its own momentum. At that moment Ned snapped the release cord.

What had happened? For an instant there was no response. Then, with a crash that almost threw the braced Alan from the car, the starting ropes straightened, creaked, and the *Cibola II*, like an arrow, shot forward. Even as Ned shouted the order Alan threw the ends of the ropes from him. As the weight of the cords slid around the uprights, the ship faltered, and then, stricken from behind by the force of her fifty-horsepower screw, the aeroplane hurled herself upward and clear of the bowsprit.

The heart of each boy stood still. Would she fly? Or were they shooting forward alone from the momentum of the dropped anchor? Their light was gone! With the sharp impetus of the start it had been dashed to the deck of the *Olivette*. Now, rushing through the night, with not even sight of the water beneath to guide them, were they ascending or falling? Cold with doubt, Ned's trembling hand pulled the lever again. The forward guides responded and the *Cibola II* changed her course—*upwards*.

Ned's heart began to throb with joy. Reach-

ing quickly to the old rudder wheel he gave it a light twist to the right; the swiftly moving car shook herself and then—*moved to the right*.

“Hurrah!” shouted Ned, no longer able to control himself. “She’s flying.”

“Shall we make for the raft?” he added a moment later.

There was a short silence as Ned gripped the steering wheel tightly.

“Head her for Mexico,” was Alan’s only answer.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ORACLE OF A FORGOTTEN RACE

Ned had just turned the flashlight on his watch. It was twenty-three minutes after nine o'clock. Only eleven minutes had elapsed since Alan raised the first alarm. Then he consulted the pocket compass. Their course was east of south. In all their calculations they had reckoned the derelict, when they landed on it, northwest of Guaymas—the estimated nearest town in Mexico—and over four hundred miles distant, at least.

They knew that for eleven days they had drifted steadily south. Whether they had drawn nearer land or further out to sea they had no way of knowing. If they had drifted at the rate of a half a mile an hour—and on some days their progress had certainly been more—they were now at least one hundred and twenty-five miles south of their drop into the sea.

On the assumption that they were almost west of the nearest civilization, the boys headed the *Cibola II* due east. While Ned held the compass, Alan brought the aeroplane gradually into her new course. Then the new course was laid by the stars. Although the turn was a wide one the

skeleton craft creaked and strained. In attempting to lessen the strain Alan eased the wheel. There was a check as if some drawing force had been suddenly removed, and the ship, righting herself, plunged in a long sweep to the right. There was a quick glide downward. The daring youths grew cold with alarm. Then a soft jarring beneath gave them hope.

The automatic compensator was in operation. Evidently the balancing planes were at work, for almost instantly the inclined craft came to a new level and slowly mounted upward again. The hair-raising experience of the first "duck" not having proven disastrous, the youthful aviators breathed again and took new courage. For a time they allowed the airship to fly forward, without attempting to bring it on a direct course to the east.

In the excitement of their precipitate departure and under the strain of attempting to operate the ship, Ned and Alan had not had time to speculate on the dangers confronting them. Ned had just begun to wonder how far they were above the water, when Alan exclaimed:

"What's that?"

The words brought to Ned the realization that he had been conscious of a strange sound. At first he took it to be the humming of the wires.

"Listen!" answered Ned. Both boys leaned forward.

As if borne on the breeze sweeping by them the sound reached the listeners. The boys shrank back together. It startled them as if a ghostly face had floated to them out of the empty sky. It was the sound of a human voice. Its tone came to them in a hollow, echoing key, like a scornful laugh.

"It's a voice!" whispered Alan.

"But where?" replied Ned reaching out and grasping Alan's trembling fingers. "Not below us—"

He did not finish. The sound suddenly contracted almost to a whistle and the laugh changed to a hiss. And the voice was now just in front of them. Alan was about to spring forward. But Ned caught him. The airship was on its balance—a change of the center of gravity meant a readjustment of the guiding rudders.

"It's here," added Ned thickly. "Hello!" he called.

The only answer was a change of the hiss back into the first jeering cry.

"Balloon ahoy!" shouted Ned at the top of his voice; and then, as if ashamed of the impulse, he added: "Maybe we are near the water!"

With nervous fingers he reached for the electric

flashlight again and turned it beneath the open framework of the car. Nothing but a black void was to be seen.

"Can you hear the splash of water?" he asked quickly.

The taunting, monotonous cry rose and fell, but, straining their ears, the alarmed and puzzled boys could distinguish no sound of the sea beneath.

Ned flashed the light toward the front of the car. As he did so the idol of the sneering face swung toward them in the current made by the propeller. In an instant the recollection of its curious formation flashed upon both boys; its hollow interior, the unexplained holes in its knees and elbows; its slit eyes and leering, pierced mouth. Ned shut off the light with a nervous cry.

"The idol!" he exclaimed. "That's what those holes mean."

"Singing in the wind," exclaimed Alan in a relieved tone.

"I've heard of the vocal Memnon of Egypt," added Ned, "the big statue that sings in the breeze like a human being. But this little thing—"

"Is certainly from Mexico," interrupted Alan. "Those old Indians must have known a thing or two. Maybe they stole the idea from Egypt."

The idol, still swinging, gave out its endless, hollow note.

"If it scared us, how do you suppose it would affect an ignorant savage?" suggested Ned after the boys had listened for a time to the creepy tones of the vibrating image. "Priests made that figure, you may be sure."

"Another Oracle of Delphi!" interrupted Alan. "I can almost imagine it talking to us."

"You are right," exclaimed Ned. "It is priestly magic. I haven't any doubt that it was an oracle—sacred above common idols—perhaps a god. Think of it!" he added. "We are listening to the same tones that may have meant life and death to a now forgotten race."

"Well," added Alan, quickly, "I don't know much about forgotten races, but I know I feel better. I don't believe in ghosts, but that thing gave me the creeps—or worse."

The *Cibola II* was sailing straight ahead without a slant. The boys held their position in the rear of the middle section, where they knew that they balanced the weight of the engine. At last Alan asked:

"What do you mean by a forgotten race?"

"The early Mexicans," responded Ned, at once, as if his mind had not left the subject. "A race so far ahead of the Indians of America that there

is no comparison; a people who possessed arts; builders of roads through wildernesses that can hardly be penetrated by the railroads of today; the makers of pyramids and temples that Egypt does not surpass; a race whose antiquity scholars cannot even guess."

"Aren't there any of 'em left?" interrupted Alan prosaically.

Ned smiled. "Not even on a page in history," he answered.

"Do you suppose those educated old ignor-amuses made this clay doll?" continued Alan.

"Alan," answered Ned, after a pause, "you are hopeless."

The rebuked Alan only grunted.

"This little image that strikes you as so amusing, this oracle of a forgotten race, is probably thousands of years old—yes, thousands. The people who made it were dead and forgotten when Columbus reached America."

"Well," interrupted Alan, properly demure, "how do you suppose it got up there in Arizona?"

"By being handed down as the most sacred relic of a dying race until, too weak to longer preserve it, their god was stolen by those who came after them—the Aztecs of history. With these it traveled, a glorious conquest, until it found a

new shrine in their holiest temple—the inner, secret khiva of the Temple of the Sun.”

“Is that all?” said Alan meekly.

“That’s enough for you tonight,” laughed Ned.

After a long period of strained silence Alan suddenly exclaimed:

“I suppose it doesn’t bother you that we haven’t a scrap of food nor a drop of water?”

“It doesn’t,” replied Ned cheerfully. “We’ll get to Mexico, some time. We may have to skirmish for food but we shan’t want for water.”

“A blanket wouldn’t have been a bad idea,” suggested Alan, ready enough to change the subject. “It’s pretty cool up here.”

“I think that means we are high enough to try again to get on our course,” remarked Ned. “Let’s try it. But this time make a wider and slower sweep.”

Before this was attempted Ned took another look at his watch and compass. It lacked a few minutes of ten o’clock and the aeroplane was headed east-south-east.

“That’s a long course to land,” explained Ned. “We’ve got to get a slant directly east.”

Alan understood. If the *Olivette* had drifted directly south they had been constantly leaving the land, as the great Mexican peninsula bears

generally east. Any offing to the south certainly lengthened the route to land. The castaways did not believe that they were much over a hundred miles from the shore, but their hope was to reach not only that but to cross over lower California and the gulf beyond. This added at least two hundred and twenty miles to their aerial flight by the most direct route.

As a matter of fact all their calculations were wrong. In their long drift the derelict had approached and not receded from the shore. And, had the castaways been able to continue their journey on the wreck, within three days, as they afterwards figured it, they would have sighted the Island of Cerros. The *Cibola II* had begun its initial flight not over sixty miles northwest of that island, which lies just off arid Point Natividad. At the moment when Ned and Alan took their second bearings they were just passing the lower bend of the great Bay of Sebastian Viscaino.

Slowly the bow of the ship was brought up to the east. Ned raised the vertical guides at the same time. Gradually the lightly balanced craft responded and just as gradually the aeroplane dipped as the center of gravity was moved in the opposite direction. The boys could hear the creak of the automatic adjuster moving on its

tracks and as the rear rudders were eased the ship righted.

Twice this was done and then Ned exclaimed:

“Now, once more, and a little further this time. I guess that will fetch her.”

As the tilting frame swung again Ned cried:

“There, stop her—hold her.”

At that moment Alan's left foot, braced on one of the light ladder-like floor strips, shot through the piece, and, to save himself, he threw himself forward on the rudder wheel. His hands, clenched on the wheel, whirled it to the left. There was a snap and the wheel spun free. A flap of the rudders in the rear told that the connecting wire had parted.

As Ned threw out his arms in the dark and caught his chum, the *Cibola II*, responding to the shift of its aft rudders, whirled to the left and then with a long, careening slant plunged downward. The helpless young aviators, hardly daring to move on the floor of the section, caught their breath and waited. Was this the end? The balance weight had shot over with a thud, but the aeroplane, like a sea bird darting for its food, swept onward and downward and then—at last—the car righted itself. Thrusting his hand through the floor braces Ned felt the balance

weight slowly returning—they were on a level keel.

In another moment the forward guides had taken new hold and the ship was mounting. They were saved—for a time at least.

“We can’t guide ourselves,” exclaimed Alan, expressing his first thought.

“No,” answered Ned. “But we can go ahead and we’re doing it beautifully. It was a close call, but the balancer did its work.”

“We can go ahead?” expostulated Alan. “But where?”

As soon as he could regain his position Ned flashed his light once more on the compass. They were bearing a few points north of east.

“I expect that’s as good luck as any,” exclaimed Ned. “I’m satisfied. Just clear away those wires and let your rear rudders run free. We’ll get along without them.”

Stars had begun to show as the night waned and clouds could be seen above, but, beneath, all was black. More than once Ned had tried to persuade Alan to take a turn at a spell of sleep, but the tension of both boys was too high to permit of rest. Therefore, they talked of their friends, of Salty Bill and his expedition, and of those waiting for them at McElmo Canyon.

"What day is this?" Ned said once in their talk.

"I think it is October 26," answered Alan.
"But I'm not sure."

"I suppose we've been given up for lost," added Ned. "I wonder if they've sent word to Chicago?"

The two boys little realized that for a week every military post in the southwest, every weather observer on the Pacific Coast and scores of vesselmen had been watching for some sign of the lost *Cibola*.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MAN WITH THE WHITE BEARD

With his legs reaching through the broken place in the floor of the car, his left arm close around the shaft of the idle rudder wheel and his shoulder against the section brace of the aeroplane, Alan had let his head fall forward. Ned knew that the boy was dozing at last. Ned himself, his ear missing no beat of the purring engine, sat tailor-wise with aching back and heavy eyes but never for an instant releasing his grasp on the rudder of the forward planes. He knew it was after four o'clock. For nearly an hour neither boy had spoken.

The cool air rushing through the car chilled the benumbed watcher, but the breeze was grateful—for on it was the welcome odor of land. Something in it told plainly of vegetation and earth and fresh water, and the tired watcher strained his eyes to detect the first hint of day. But, even as he watched, Ned's own eyelids drooped—only for a moment he thought—and then, it was the gray of morning. One glance below and he shouted aloud:

“Land! Alan, land!”

His companion roused himself instantly. There could be no mistake. What might be below them they could not yet make out, but plainly it was not water. Dark stretches and lighter elevations passed swiftly beneath them.

“It’s the smell of the woods,” exclaimed Alan. “It’s trees!”

In their eagerness, flight now became tedious and the boys impatiently awaited the sun. It came at last. They made no note of the hour. But the first pale glow in the east seemed to cast the shifting panorama beneath into even darker shadows. One thing they knew. They were crossing a wide and deep valley. The first break in the east silhouetted before them the serrated peaks of a low-lying range of mountains.

As night seemed to thicken beneath, the sun leaped into view with a sudden burst of tropic splendor. The black peaks of the mountains before them flashed into golden pink and an eagle, as if to herald the new day, soared upward toward the paling stars.

“And we are foreign travelers at last,” added Ned exuberantly. “We are over Mexico.” And then, thoughtfully, he added, “But we’ve missed our coast towns. We are on the table land.”

Alan looked around in some concern.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed. "Isn't that all right?"

"It's better than the Pacific or the deserts of Lower California, but—"

"But what?" insisted Alan.

"We've passed over the land of hotels and telegraph and railroad."

"Is that all?" exclaimed Alan. "You scared me."

"That's all," answered Ned, "except that we ought to turn around and go back."

"Well, why not," answered his companion. "I'm willing."

"You'll have to climb out and fix our rudder first," laughed Ned.

Alan groaned, almost in despair. "And I broke it," he added, ruefully.

"You did nothing of the sort," replied Ned stoutly. "A defective plank did it."

Day was coming swiftly. Beneath the aeroplane, as it soared steadily onward toward the mountains, a dense forest appeared. Here and there a bird had already darted from its leafy retreat, a brilliant shaft of red and yellow and blue against the opaque emerald of tropic vegetation. But there was no time for Ned and Alan to feast their eyes on this picture—the rugged barrier in their path engaged their attention.

Fortunately the *Cibola II* was headed for one of the gaps in the range. As the aeroplane was flying low, the young adventurers had not seen beyond the mountains which they were approaching. These rose like a series of walls, black beneath the shadows yet lingering on them. But, beyond the heights, the boys knew that these shadows had already given way to the tints and warmth of the new day. When the airship, now bearing slightly earthward, passed over the first slope of the range, it was fifteen minutes of six o'clock. As Ned called the hour Alan broke out in an exclamation of surprise.

He had suddenly caught the first view of the region beyond the ridge. As the boys craned their necks a panorama of surpassing beauty opened before them. The high range over which they were passing was but the raised ruin of an endless table land. On its softly undulating surface a dense forest reached to the distant horizon. The mountains themselves shelved gently, by verdure and flower-painted slopes, into the emerald walls of the jungled trees beneath—the untracked wilderness of Central Mexico.

“What’s the matter with landing on this slope?” suggested Alan at once. “We can never make our way out of that ocean of trees.”

“We can go for another hour,” argued Ned,

half to himself, "and that may mean forty miles."

In five minutes they were at sea once more—but this time over billows and depths of tropic vegetation. In less than half an hour the rim of the mountains had dropped low on the western horizon.

"I'd like mighty well to see signs of hills ahead," suggested Ned at last as he tapped the gasoline reservoirs and listened to their hollow sound. "We can't—"

"Look," shouted Alan excitedly. "There's something!"

Before Ned gave any indication that he saw, he shot out his hand and threw the engine clutch to half speed.

Directly in their path a brown point rose like a spire in the wilderness of trees and vines. It was sharp and distinct like a church steeple. In the monotony of the sea of green it fixed itself on the two observers like a monument. As the propeller dropped in its swift revolution and the *Cibola II* eased in its flight the surprise of the boys gave way to startling wonder.

A weird chant fell on their ears. Out of the impenetrable depths beneath them rose the drone of human voices in barbaric song. Then, as the airship drifted onward and their line of vision widened, Alan clutched Ned's arm—the thick

tropic tangle had suddenly opened and the brown point had widened into the sides of a pyramid.

On a plaza, half way up the sides of a gigantic pyramidal structure, with their arms extended toward the just rounded sun, stood three men. As the new sun struck the group one glance told that they were Indians. Even in the first quick glance Ned and Alan saw more. In the rear of the group, his hands bound behind him, stood a fourth man. Instantly the two boys knew that this man was not an Indian; his hair and long beard were snow white.

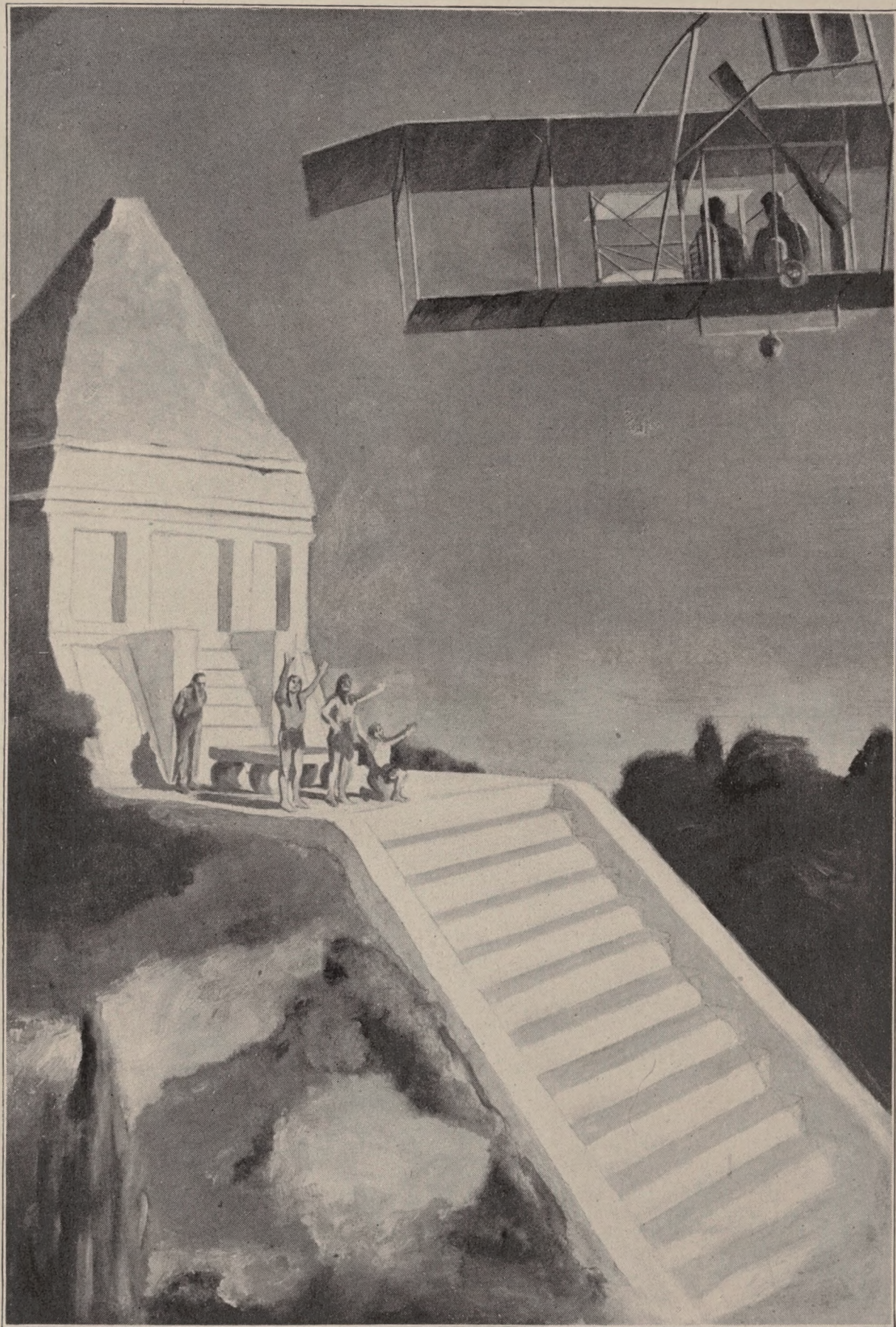
"It's a white man," whispered Ned.

"We can't stop," cried Alan, anticipating what was in Ned's mind.

"Can't?" exclaimed Ned. "What if we were there and he was here? Would we expect him to leave us because it meant danger?" He had his hand on the engine.

"You're right," cried Alan. "He's in trouble."

Both boys knew that their first landing meant the end of the aeroplane. And both realized that descent was like jumping into the open sea. The picture had flashed before them so quickly that they had not even speculated on its meaning, but something in the breast of each told him that a member of his own race needed his help. Without stopping to think it out they also realized



HALF WAY UP THE SIDES STOOD THREE MEN.

that if the white man before them was in peril, they were about to put themselves in the same position. They had no weapons; but without hesitation and as a man might plunge into the water at the risk of his own life to save a dog, Ned—for the engine had been shut off the instant that the pathetic figure of the white man had been seen—threw the forward planes down and the airship sank slowly earthward.

Not until then, apparently, had the aeroplane been noticed. There was a sudden break in the low, wild song, a sharp cry, and the boys saw the three sun-gazing Indians turn. At the same moment the face of the monumental structure rushed into view. It was an immense double pyramid rising from a wide terraced mound at the foot of which, for the first time, the awe-stricken boys saw a narrow watercourse. On the eastern face of the lower pyramid wide steps rose to the terrace on which stood the three Indians and the white man. At the base of the pyramid, almost lost in a maze of stone structures, were grouped hundreds of strangely garbed savages.

The aeroplane dropped lower and lower. A gentle breeze wafted it to the left. It was headed toward the upper plaza.

"They are priests," said Ned at last in a low tone, as the garb of the three Indians on the

pyramid could be made out. "It is a religious ceremony of some kind."

The three Indians were retreating to the far edge of the terrace. The white man, his hands bound behind him, stood as if transfixed.

"Whatever happens," added Ned suddenly, "keep a stiff upper lip. See, they are scared already. A good bluff may work better than a firearm here."

But, at that moment, their headway almost lost, the veering breeze seemed to die out, and the *Cibola II*, as if eager to make some expiring demonstration, darted to the right and shot toward the ground. As it did so the automatic balancer slid over, the tips readjusted themselves, and for an instant the drop was checked. In that second Ned and Alan hurled themselves over the rear of the lower frame and, ten feet from the earth, dropped from the ship. One end of the car fell on Ned's back, but Alan, stumbling forward, escaped the crash.

The drop had been made at the extreme rear edge of the open ground at the base of the strange towering pyramid. The aeroplane was in ruins, so far as further flight was concerned. The lower frame was smashed, but the strong central section of the car yet stood, almost box-like, among the mass of twisted supports and torn

silk. By the time Alan had lifted the wreckage from Ned, who was only slightly bruised, a horde of shrieking savages was upon them.

The two boys together sprang toward the central part of the ruined car. Before them, in a terrifying circle, ran the lines of the apparently equally alarmed Indians. But they had paused suddenly in their rush. Back of them, and beyond a maze of stone sculptures and monuments on the ground terrace, rose the wide steps of the great pyramid. Down these, to the added alarm of the fear-stricken lads, the three priests were hurrying with flying steps. The snowy-bearded white man still stood, as if cut in stone, on the plaza high up on the pyramid.

"Be game," whispered Ned. His mouth was framed to say more, but the words did not come. A long, thin arrow shot out from the rear of the pressing line of natives and passed directly between the two boys.

With fear in his heart and trembling limbs Ned sprang forward. His face was white and cold.

"Back," he shouted, sweeping his arms before him. To a man the savages retreated a step.

"Look," he exclaimed, without a quaver in his voice. Turning toward the wrecked aeroplane he bowed low with his hands on his breast. Then, wheeling sharply, he pointed toward the sky and

westward. Again he turned to the car and bowed as if in reverent obeisance. Then, facing the ring of amazed savages once more, he laid off his cap, extended both arms toward the mounting sun and stood motionless.

As he stood thus he was conscious that the compact line of Indians had opened and that the three Indians from the upper plaza were making their way forward. Not a word was uttered. When the priests were before him, Ned, with no plan yet formed, but with a stout heart, turned and faced them boldly. The only thought in his mind was that he and Alan were messengers from the sky. Feebly playing on the idea once again he turned and pointed skyward. The priests, stolid of face, looked on in silence.

Alan, standing by the car, had puzzled his brain in vain to think of some way in which to assist his chum in his theatrical efforts. Along the open river bed a light breeze was blowing. A puff of it shot into the open ground.

“Ah, huh!—Ah, huh!” came in a low sound from the car behind him. The suspended image swayed forward and touched his shoulder. The sneering idol! The oracle of a forgotten race! Instantly, all that Ned had said to him of what this relic might have once meant, flashed into his muddled head. He grasped at the thought. With

trembling fingers he loosened the cord holding the vocal idol and, with an inspiration he never understood—almost without knowing what he was doing—he swung the figure back and forth as a priest might circle a holy lamp.

“Ah, huh!—Ah, huh!”

The centuries-old monotone of the hollow image sounded like a voice from the tomb.

Before Ned could grasp the full significance of Alan's accidental but masterly stroke, there was a piercing cry. One of the three priests, a wrinkled and aged man, had thrown himself on the ground at Ned's feet and before the alarmed lad could spring away the venerable Indian had clasped the boy's foot in his hands and placed it on his prostrate head. At the same moment the other priests turned to the Indians behind them and began shouting at the tops of their voices.

As if addressing a god, Ned turned toward Alan who was now holding the idol reverently aloft.

“I don't know what this all means, old man,” he exclaimed oratorically and winking, “but I guess the bluff went all right.”

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SACRIFICIAL PYRAMID

The warlike attitude of the savages changed at once. The two priests shouted in monotonous repetition words that seemed to ring with jubilation. The Indians began to press forward; at first curiously and then eagerly. Both boys saw that the change in the attitude of the natives was somehow due to the idol. The murmur of the excitement that arose, a certain awe that had fallen on the now broken line and the fixed stare of one hundred and fifty pairs of eyes showed this.

"Keep it up, Alan," exclaimed Ned in a full, round voice, as if addressing some hearer in the skies and assuming that no one before him understood English. "Keep up the bluff. Be mysterious. The idol has done it."

Alan placed the little figure on the frame of the car and sank on his knees before it, lowering his face to the ground and repeating, mysteriously and solemnly:

"Eeny, meeny, miny, mo;
Catch a nigger by the toe,
If he hollers let him go,
Eeny, meeny, miny mo."

At the same time Ned motioned the ancient priest at his feet to rise. The venerable Indian was trembling with emotion. His eyes fell again on the clay effigy and in a sudden paroxysm of either fear or joy he threw himself once more on the ground. The other priest did the same, and then, as if inspired by some frenzy, all the other savages followed his example.

Ned joined Alan and knelt with him before the object of all this devotion. He whispered:

"You are the custodian of the sacred relic; I am the vanguard. We won't give it up until we have solved the mystery of the white man."

Slowly rising, with low obeisance, Alan again approached the figure and swung it in the air—this time swiftly like a swinging top.

"Ah, huh!—Ah, huh!" almost shrieked the image.

The prostrate savages, following the example of the chief priest, set up a cry—almost a pæan of praise. Ned leaned forward, intently listening, and then, suddenly, as if the hollow figure had spoken, he threw his arms in the air and shouted:

"White man, ahoy!"

The figure of the white haired and snowy bearded man was still standing erect on the upper plaza of the pyramid. In the few minutes that

had elapsed since the boys had first seen him, the man had not once altered his statuesque position. Even the sound of Ned's voice seemed to have no effect.

"Come down," cried Ned again, at the top of his voice. Both boys were sure they saw the strange figure straighten a trifle, but the man made no move.

"Come," exclaimed Ned to Alan. "We've got to go to him. Remember, the idol is our passport."

Then, approaching the three priests, Ned motioned them to arise. In the girdle of the chief of these there was a poniard or dagger. Deliberately Ned took it by the handle. At the first movement of protest on the part of the priest he promptly released the knife and stepped back. With all the dignity he could throw into his tones Ned repeated the idol's siren, "Ah, huh! —Ah, huh!" The effect was magical. With signs that could not be mistaken Ned ordered the priest to lay his knife at the sneering idol's feet.

As if hypnotized, the old man advanced reverently and did so. The weapon was a keen-edged implement of green stone. Thereupon Ned, extemporising his litle play as he proceeded, advanced to the image. Putting his ear to its

sneering mouth he quickly placed his heel on the blade of the knife. It snapped in three pieces.

"They were going to kill that white man," suggested Ned in a loud voice, as if again addressing the kneeling savages, "and with this knife. Perhaps it was a sacrifice," he added, as the idea dawned on him. "If it was, we'll save the man."

Laying his handkerchief on the ground Ned placed the fragments of the knife in it and then deliberately tied them in a small bundle.

"Hold on," whispered Alan, "I have an idea. Hand me the package."

Ned did so, dropping on his knees as if Alan were a priestly representative of the idol. Taking the knotted handkerchief Alan stepped into the car and, from the reservoir valve, saturated the linen cloth with gasoline. At the same time he concealed a match in his hand. Returning he made a salaam to the idol; placed the gasoline-soaked handkerchief on the clasped knees of the figure and, as he did so, deftly scratched the match on the hard clay. A mass of flames shot into the air and the spell of the image was complete. In tongues of devouring fire the oracle had annihilated the emblem of war and death.

With renewed cries of wonder and alarm priests and savages sprang back from the blazing idol.

"I reckon that did the business," exclaimed Alan. "I'm ready. Lead on."

With the dignity of a field marshal Ned waved the terrified savages aside once more and the two boys advanced without hindrance toward the pyramid. The boys' wonder at the astonishing effect wrought upon the Indians by the clay image was almost as nothing compared with that which they felt at the amazing picture now before them. Afterwards, when Ned and Alan had made themselves familiar with the history, so far as it is known, of the marvelous ruins that lie entombed in these Mexican forests, they began to believe that their senses had not deceived them. As they stood there, what they saw seemed only a dream. Even Ned, with some knowledge of the hidden palaces, temples, and statues that have been lost for countless ages in these tropic woods, was not prepared to believe in the reality of what he saw.

They were making their way forward on an enclosed terrace of earth. Behind them a wall of mammoth stone blocks dropped thirty feet to the tree-tunnelled river beneath. The terrace, which was about six hundred feet square, ended in three small pyramids on both the east and west sides. The summit of only one of these was perfect. The others were in crumbling, vine-covered

ruins. On two of them trees were growing. Within the terrace, a city of small temples, statues, minor elevations paved with gigantic stone slabs and almost countless stone platforms lay in the chaos of ruin wrought by time and vegetation. But, strangely enough, there was no sign of present habitation or life.

On the north side arose the most stupendous wonder of all, the tree-topping pyramid on whose elevated plaza could be seen the object of the boys' concern—the white man—who yet stood immovably facing the sun. There was no time to note the ruins through which they were passing. Afterwards, in part at least, they saw them—columns of figures in bas-relief and carved designs perfect in detail—but at that moment they had but one thought.

Bearing the blazing idol before them Ned and Alan hurried forward. They were not followed. When the clay became too hot for his comfort, Alan paused, set it on what he afterwards made out to be one of the most elaborately carved altars, and, while the dying fumes shot from the sneering idol's mouth and eyes, the boys circled the stone structure intoning this sepulchral chant:

“Old Mother Hubbard, she went to the cupboard—”

"Come," urged Ned again, "we've had enough of this foolishness." He was looking toward the plaza and its strange occupant. "He hears us!" he cried.

The snow-white locks of the man were thrown back and his head was raised as if he at last heard but could not understand. Yet his face still fronted the east; he neither turned nor tried to look.

"He's blind!" whispered Alan.

Catching up the wonder-working idol the two boys hastened forward. One hundred and thirty steps, each eighteen inches high, confronted them. Fifty feet from the top—and now only the man from his waist up could be seen—they paused for breath.

"Are you a white man?" shouted Ned.

The strange figure turned at last. The sun fell on his white sightless eyes. His lips moved, but no sound came from them. His arms were held close behind him; his long white beard fell on the ragged remnants of a patched and worn shirt of wool. About his waist an Indian belt held the shreds of a pair of trousers. With a last leap the exhausted boys reached the plaza. It was of stone, smooth and cemented.

Both boys rushed forward. Before they could speak again the form of the man seemed to stif-

fen itself as if to meet a shock; his seamed and bronzed face set itself in defiance.

"We are white men—Americans," exclaimed Ned again. "You are a white man?"

As if understanding at last the man's head lunged forward, his horrible blank eyes seemed to expand as if to see, and then, without a word, he collapsed and sank to the stone plaza. With desperate haste Ned and Alan lifted him. Directly behind him and in the center of the plaza was a single long slab of stone elevated on four globes. On this the boys placed the emaciated and unconscious body.

With one slash the thongs binding the man's hands were cut. Far below them the boys could make out the wonder-paralyzed savages.

"We were right," whispered Ned, "and we are too late. It is a human sacrifice. He's lying on the altar on which the demons meant to kill him. But why? And how did he come here? A white man, worn to nothing, blind and weakened almost beyond understanding?"

The man moved and groaned feebly. The boys fanned him and stroked his hands. His lips seemed to move.

Ned leaned over him.

"You are saved," he almost shouted. "We are white men."

Suddenly the sightless eyes and the vacant face turned toward the speaker.

"White?" It was a strange, hoarse whisper.

"Yes, you are saved."

The recumbent figure sprang up; the feeble arms reached forward—

"White—English?" repeated the trembling figure.

"White, yes; friends."

The weakened man fell back again and his whole body quivered.

"Who are you?" he moaned.

"Two boys from America. And when you are strong enough we are going to take you away with us."

The feeble fingers of the old man groped in the air. The boys understood. They put their hands in his. With a frenzied motion the white crowned figure ran his fingers over the arms and bodies of his rescuers. A wan smile formed itself on his lips.

"What—what year," he murmured at last, wearily.

"What year?" repeated Alan, "this is 190—"

For some moments the emaciated victim lay without speaking.

"Seven years," he almost whispered at last. "Seven years in—in hell."

"Were you a prisoner seven years?" asked Ned. The man moved his head.

"Well, you are saved now," added Alan.

Again the man attempted to rise.

"Too late," he cried desperately, "too late. I've suffered too long. I'm dying."

The frightened boys drew back. The human sacrifice had succumbed to the shock of a white man's voice. Then the boys' pluck returned. They would save the old man. Life was not extinct, and while it fluttered there was hope.

"No," exclaimed Ned, "you are not dying. You are going to get well."

A groan escaped the sufferer.

"I couldn't suffer more. If you can make this hollow shell a man again; if you can take me from this, I—I—"

"We can and will," interrupted Alan.

"I'll make you rich, rich," almost shouted the aged captive. "I'll give it to you—all. Here, see—"

The struggling victim thrust his hand beneath his shirt—but he was too weak to do more. His arms fell on his chest. Tears sprang to the eyes of both boys.

"Tell us," urged Ned. "Did the Indians blind you?"

The old man shuddered.

"They burned out my eyes that I might not see this place. Years ago they brought me here—when my hair turned white. Day and night I have lived in a stone house I never saw. They—they prayed to me," he added, almost under his breath.

"They prayed to you?" exclaimed Alan.

"Prayed to me like a sacred thing."

"And then they brought you up here to—to—"

"Kill me? Aye, lads, to kill me. When I learned their talk I knew it would come some day."

The old man fell back in his weakness.

"But they haven't," added Ned, bravely, "and we are going to take you back home. We'll get food and water for you—"

The suffering man lay without reply for a few moments.

"It's too late," he murmured at last. "But—but—late or soon, you can have it all—I—I've saved the secret for years—it's yours."

Again he pointed feebly to his breast.

"Why did they bring you up here?" went on Alan after a longer pause. He could not say, "Why did they want to kill you?"

At last the fast weakening victim spoke again.

"It's high up, isn't it?" he asked wearily.

"It's above the trees," explained Ned with emotion.

"And you can see the clouds and sky?"

"Yes," answered Alan.

"Here, up here in the sky," went on the old man at last, "to call back the idol of their—their—"

"To recover for them the idol stolen from their ancestors years ago," suggested Ned thickly.

"A white man—a white man was to bring it. I—"

"And you were to summon back the sacred relic or die?" added Ned trembling.

"— or — or die — I —"

There were no more questions and no more answers. The worn captive had escaped from his bondage.

CHAPTER XXV

THE SECRET OF THE SERPENT'S MOUTH

The realization that the captive was dead was a shock to the boys. As they arose and turned from the sacrificial altar on which the worn and wounded body was stretched in its endless sleep, their eyes fell on a scene which might easily have disconcerted stouter hearts. From the plaza on which they stood, far up the slope of the pyramid, they could look about only as if they stood on the margin of a huge bowl. Beyond the sharp circle of towering trees waves of green ran like over-topping billows. From its summit, no doubt, the pyramid commanded a view of the horizon-bound waste.

“And it’s through that labyrinth of vegetation that we’ll have to get out!” suggested Ned. “We can’t do it without guides.”

The risen sun now flooded the great well in the wilderness with golden light. The green-encrusted grey ruins and the tendril-twisted columns of carving lay at the foot of the pyramid in stupendous chaos. Ned and Alan, dropped out of the sky into this dead and lost wonderland, were viewing vestiges of the past on which the

eyes of white men had never rested. The sublimity of what lay about them dwarfed the present peril of the two lads. But practical Alan could not very long forget the present, even in the shadow of the unknown monuments of the past.

"Then our idol must give us guides," he exclaimed, "and it can't do it up here. We have these heathens going. Let's finish the job."

"And this—?" suggested Ned, indicating the body of the torture-drawn victim.

"We'll make these gibbering savages give him decent burial."

Composing the body of the dead man in its last sleep, Ned and Alan slowly descended to the terrace. Marching again through its crumbled remains to the spot where the Indians were yet grouped, the boys were surprised to note, for the first time, how ill-suited to their wonderful surroundings the savages seemed. Half naked, almost weaponless and without the slightest trace of nobility in countenance, the cowering assembly behaved like frightened sheep. The priests alone stood their ground.

These facts, with the total absence of tents or huts, convinced the boys that the permanent habitations of the savages were not among the ruins.

"Only the priests stay here," suggested Ned. "These degenerate descendants of the civilization

that wrought these gigantic works live elsewhere. They probably assemble here for ceremony. No doubt they came today for some festival."

"Yes," bitterly added Alan, "a festival of death."

"The white man was a prisoner here—in one of these half ruined temples. We must see that prison first of all," added Ned.

"Why?" asked Alan.

"Because he may have left some record. The secret he seemed to think he had may be there."

Before the boys left the plaza on the pyramid they had made an examination of the white man's body. But nothing rewarded their search. The despairing captive had spoken of a secret that would make some one rich and had made signs indicating that the secret was carried beneath his shirt. Nothing was found on his emaciated frame or in his pockets. When Ned and Alan approached the Indians once more, they were glad to find the priests awaiting them with food and drink. Then they realized that they were hungry.

Almost ignoring the savages, they placed the idol on the beautifully carved base of a column. Bowing and scraping, and repeating chance words in a pompous and oracular manner, the boys knelt before the image, and, accepting the food—not as a welcome gift, but as a matter of

course—they slowly and with dignity ate of the crude corn tortillas and bananas and drank with relish the foaming but bitter, unsweetened chocolate proffered them. At the conclusion of the meal the head priest was summoned. Ned pointed to the plaza above and described by gesture a flowing beard, and then peremptorily swept his arm toward the ruined temples about them. The priest understood.

Led by the Indian high priest and followed by his two assistants, Ned and Alan crossed the terrace to its eastern side. Here, at the foot of the middle and smallest pyramid, a stone structure rose about four feet above the surface of the ground. Passing to the north, the boys discovered that the exposed portion of the structure was the upper part of what had been a carefully wrought temple about twelve feet wide and nearly forty feet long. On three sides the solid, packed earth reached within four feet of the roof, which was flat and composed wholly of carefully cut, smooth slabs of stone, apparently cemented together. The entrance was between two columns delicately carved in bas-relief. Prominent in the design were intricate cartouches resembling those of Oriental records.

The main figure of the column on the right, judging by the smooth face and the delicate

hands, was evidently that of a woman. On the left column the grotesque representation of a man stared at the observer. The distorted mouth and wide open eyes of this figure were evidently designed to inspire fear. These columns were partly imbedded in the stone walls of the front of the temple, and an opening between them gave entrance to the corridor-like room behind. This room was divided into two parts by a wall, with a small doorway in it, which cut across the apartment about twenty feet from the entrance.

Both these rooms were lighted through openings left just beneath the roof monoliths, too high above the floor to permit a view through them, but admitting air and reflected light. The first chamber was absolutely barren of decoration, utensils or furniture and showed no signs of use. But, strangely enough, the smooth walls were tinted a dull, faded red. The second chamber could be entered only through the low opening in the heavy partition. This aperture was not more than eighteen inches high by two feet wide. Just in front of the opening was a narrow, rectangular pit, slightly broader than the aperture and extending about a foot below the base of the entrance. Alongside the pit was a heavy slab of stone. Ned saw the purpose of this at once.

"All you have to do," he said, pointing to the

pit and the grave-stone-like slab, "is to drop the slab into that pit. The opening would then be sealed. From the other side you could not budge the barrier. It is a prison without lock or key."

As they prepared to enter the far chamber Alan stopped.

"Go ahead," he said to Ned. "I'll wait here."

The priests were on their knees just without, jabbering and beating their breasts.

"That stone fits too easily," explained Alan. "I'll just make sure that some interested person doesn't drop it into place with us on the wrong side of it."

Ned remained some moments in the inner temple room.

"That's where the white man lived," he explained when he had crawled out again. "There is a rough skin bed on poles in there and a water jug. He had tried to write on the walls, but I couldn't make out anything, not even his name. There isn't a scrap of clothing or other furniture."

"Is the room like this?"

"Looks as if it had been a place of worship. It has red-tinted walls like this, but at the far end—and it's the only thing in the room—is an altar that I want you to see. Just go in and look it over while I watch."

Alan did so. Before him, almost like marble in the keen morning light, he saw a marvelously carved single block of stone about six feet square and four feet high. On top of this was another section of white stone, divided into thirty-six tablets, on which were hieroglyphics in low relief. The large stone rested on four spheres of darker material. Each side of the main portion of the altar, or whatever it was, bore the effigies in high relief of four individuals seated cross-legged in Oriental fashion. All the figures wore breast-plates and head-dresses of gorgeous and complicated design, suggesting feathers, or the head ornaments of the Javanese of today. Each of the characters held in its hand an instrument, whether scepter or weapon could not be made out. And, at least once on the face of each side, appeared the unmistakable form of a serpent.

"Think of it!" exclaimed Alan when he reappeared after a long examination of the wonderful carving. "The blind man never even saw those figures."

"But you can be certain that he knew them," suggested Ned. "In his long, sunless days of captivity you can be sure that he examined every inch of those carvings with his fingers. He learned them better in that way than we have with our eyes."

It was now after ten o'clock. The boys agreed that the thing to do at once was to see that the dead prisoner had decent burial. Then they would attempt to coerce the priests and their followers to lead them out of the noisome jungle of vegetation to civilization, or to a point, at least, whence they might find assistance. As a reward for that service they would surrender in time the precious idol to its worshipers.

Following this plan they made signs that four men must ascend to the plaza above and remove the body lying there. But at once they saw that this was not possible. The looks of horror that came into the faces of the priests suggested that the pyramid was probably never profaned by those out of the priesthood. After pretending to consult the oracle the boys motioned the priests to perform that office. Under the leadership of Ned the two younger priests at once mounted the pyramid. The dead man lay at full length on the altar. As Ned approached the body he noticed that the breeze had wafted the ragged, buttonless shirt of the corpse to one side. Carefully lifting the long white beard of the victim to replace the shirt, Ned sprang back in surprise. On the white breast of the dead man he had seen what looked like words. The two priests stood unmoved. Trembling, Ned lifted the dead man's

snowy, flowing beard once more. He was not mistaken. Crudely, but unmistakably tattooed on the pallid flesh were these words:

“Blind, crazy snake head al——”

What did they mean? Plainly enough that the despairing captive when already blind had feared that he was losing his mind. He had pointed to his breast when he had spoken of his secret, but what meaning had these words? Looking again Ned could only conclude that a portion of the laboriously tattooed words was missing—worn away, perhaps, without the desperate man’s knowledge. As the priests shouldered the dead man and slowly descended to the terrace Ned racked his brain over this puzzle. “Snake al”——? Then the solution came in a flash. “Al——” meant altar. “Snake altar” could only mean the altar in the man’s prison. In some manner the snake altar was to reveal the old man’s secret.

Alan’s greatest surprise was over the fact that a blind man without needle or color should have been able to trace these words on his own flesh.

Ned’s answer was not satisfactory, but it had to suffice.

“Because you can’t figure out just how a marvelous thing can be done, never conclude that it can’t be done. There are the words and they are pierced in the skin. That is enough. I think

we'll find something on that altar that we didn't see a while ago."

Before noon the body of the unknown white man, carefully wrapped in a length of silk from the wings of the aeroplane, had been buried beneath five feet of dark, soft earth in the adjoining forest. With his knife Ned cut the date on the surface of the nearest tree and then, having finished the only rites they could administer, the boys thoughtfully returned to the terrace. They signified to the Indians their desire for food and it was brought. Immediately afterwards they made their way again to the red-walled temple of the Snake Altar.

Ned crawled into the second compartment. As before, Alan remained without in the first chamber. The priests took their places beyond the strange doorway columns. It was now high noon and the altar room of the temple was at its fullest illumination. Rapidly Ned examined the serpent forms on three sides of the carved block. On none of them did he discover a sign or mark to reward his labors, but he understood now what he was to find. The mouth of each snake was slightly open, and between the fanged lips he could detect a cavity cut within. On the rear side of the altar one serpent only appeared. It was coiled between the two central figures, and

the head, in high relief, almost protruded from the face of the block. Ned struck a match. Within the hollow throat of the snake he detected a folded bit of paper.

The paper, rolled into a compressed cylinder, had been forced between the delicate stone fangs of the graven reptile, and then, expanding, had filled the cavity. It was impossible to extract it. Wrenching loose a leg of the hard wood from the rude bed in the corner of the chamber Ned severed the protruding head with one blow. As it struck the stone floor with a sharp, ringing sound Alan knew that something had been discovered.

"I have it," shouted Ned. In another instant he had crawled into the front chamber. Eagerly the two boys rushed from the temple into the sunlight. With a haughty wave of his hand Ned motioned the priests to be gone. When they had done so Ned opened the dusty scrap of paper. It was a leaf from a cheap account book, and on it was the dead man's secret, written in lead pencil in a crabbed, illiterate hand. They made out these words:

"Job Marias, my pardner, died this day, July 20 [no year was mentioned], I think of a feever berried him. August 3 I have been taken by Indians. August 7 the mine is lost I am a pris-

ner and mistreated. If this book comes in the hands of strangers the mine is near Temamasachic in Cheewawwa [Chihuahua]. You come to the town up the Papigo river from La Hunta [Junta] on the Yaagua. For direction you go up the river from Temamasachic six hours to the stone head by the big tree on the left bank. From the top forks of the big tree the mountains lie east maybe ten miles. There are two peaks alike. Between them you come on the high land. By my compass the mine lies a point north of east at the first big bend in the little creek. There too is my cabin with all the gold we mined. This I have wrote later I don't know when. I came near dying but I am well again. They burnt out my eyes. I am in this new place. I came into Mexico two years before I was taken prisoner. My name is Daniel Hortop and my folks live in Preston, Lancaster County, England. God pity me."

CHAPTER XXVI

SAVED BY AN IDOL

When Ned and Alan had finished reading old Daniel Hortop's crude letter they felt no sense of exultation. Alan made the first comment:

"I suppose," he said slowly, "you'll want to find this place, wherever it is."

"No," answered Ned thoughtfully, "for two reasons. We must get out of here. Our families and our friends must be greatly alarmed. And then, the mine isn't ours. This old man may have a family—sons, perhaps. It's our duty to find his relatives and give them his secret."

Alan nodded his head in approval.

"Now, what?" he asked.

"Sleep and rest," answered Ned. "I'm dead tired. I guess we've been working harder than we thought. But we must remember Salty Bill's maxim. One of us must sleep today and the other tonight. So we'll cast lots. Tomorrow we'll see what the idol can do toward carrying us to our friends."

The day sleep happily fell to Ned, who really needed it most. Retiring to the inner room of the temple he threw himself on the cot so long

used by the old white man. When he awoke the terrace of ruined statues and columns was deep in the shadows of evening. Alan, sitting between the door columns, was dozing lightly, but with the precious image fast locked in his arms. Before the temple stood the three priests. On the ground was food and chocolate.

"We might as well know the worst," exclaimed Ned, arousing the half conscious Alan. "I'm going to try to make a bargain with these heathen—but how long have *you* been asleep?" he interjected suddenly.

"I don't know," answered Alan with embarrassment. Then he looked around with a startled air. "Hours, I think," he confessed with alarm.

"Well, don't be scared," laughed Ned. "That's a good sign. It proves that our naked friends are afraid of us even when we are asleep. That means that the idol is still all-powerful."

The Indian priests pointed to the waiting food and sank on their knees. But Ned shook his head. Taking the end of the string attached to the idol's neck he swung the image in the air. As it wailed and sighed the priests prostrated themselves. Bringing the circling figure to a stop Ned placed it in the shadowed entrance to the temple, and with a peremptory motion signaled to the groveling priests to rise.

Standing silent and motionless for a few moments he finally shook his head sadly. The priests followed every move. Then, indicating a long beard and hair and pointing to the plaza of the pyramid above he again made gestures of sorrow. From that he changed suddenly to every outward sign of indignation, and, whirling, pointed to the idol. This action was meant to let the Indians know that the sneering idol was incensed over the treatment given the white prisoner. Again Ned's face dropped into deep melancholy. Then, with a sweep of his hand he bade the priests leave.

"That's enough for tonight," exclaimed Ned as the chiefs of the savages disappeared in the night. "Lesson number two will come in the morning."

"You did it like an actor," commented Alan, "I understood it all."

Then Alan took his turn on the skin couch. Without a light, and only his own wild crowding thoughts to keep him company, Ned found the hours passing slowly, but about midnight the tired, restless boy had an idea. He thrust the idol through the opening into the inner room, dropped the stone down into its slit, and, stretching himself in front of it, fell into a second sound

and grateful sleep. Alan's rapping on the rear of the slab awoke him at daybreak.

As they hastened from the temple a strange sight met their eyes. In the golden light of the new sun, against the background of crumbling white ruins, knelt the entire tribe of Indians, outlined like a vivid picture in oils. Within the silent semicircle and just before the temple door stood the two younger priests. At their feet knelt their venerable companion. The kneeling priest was wholly naked with the exception of a breech-cloth, and his shrunken arms were tied at his back. His head, bent forward, hid his face, but something in the man's attitude told a story without words.

The two boys sprang forward, each realizing what it meant. The aged priest was about to give up his life to palliate the anger of the sneering idol. One of the younger priests had already swung a keen stone machete in the air, when Alan threw his arms about the would-be executioner and the human sacrifice was averted. Trembling with excitement, Ned lifted the kneeling victim to his feet, loosened with one cut of his knife the thongs binding his arms and withdrew the gibbering priest to the temple entrance.

Cries of lamentation began to rise on the morn-

ing air, but Ned silenced them with a shout of indignation. At Ned's suggestion Alan hastily brought out the idol and began swinging it about his head. Ned threw himself on the ground. "Ah, huh!—Ah, huh!" sang the figure. "Ah, huh!—Ah, huh!" exclaimed Ned, imitating the sounds as nearly as he could. Then, as the wail came to an end, he arose and with indignation again pictured on his face began lesson two.

First he made signs that the little idol was incensed over the proposed human sacrifice. Then, pointing to Alan and himself, he indicated that they were the messengers who had brought the ancient relic out of the skies. When he believed that this was understood he again pointed to Alan and himself and then, wheeling suddenly, extended his arm to the west. The eyes of all were on him. Again he repeated the motion and then, with a sweep of the arm as if to include the Indians, he caught Alan's hand in his and made motions as if walking. At last he could see that the aged priest, at least, understood.

Taking up the idol reverently he advanced toward the chief priest and made as if about to put the image in the Indian's hands. Then, suddenly withdrawing it, he again pointed to Alan and himself and the west. The priests understood instantly. With shouts they turned and

faced the kneeling savages. Again and again cries that sounded like noise of jubilation rang over the terrace, and when the priests, their faces wrought into frenzied looks of happiness, turned and threw themselves on the ground before the young adventurers, Ned and Alan knew that they had been saved by their mummary.

"But they may change their minds when they have their precious bit of baked mud," suggested Alan when the mob had been led away by the priests, and the two boys were eagerly attacking the breakfast of fruit and cakes left for them.

"It won't matter then," answered Ned, with his mouth full of luscious sapadillo and a bowl of fragrant black chocolate in his hands. "They'll not get their idol until we see a house roof, wherever and whenever that may be."

Within an hour the priests returned and gave signs that all was ready. The boys were glad to observe that, in addition to six Indians, the three priests were to be of their escort. This gave them assurance, because the head priest in particular had seemed dominated by the power of the idol. The priests were empty-handed. The six Indians carried blankets, corn, a stone for grinding meal, chocolate, pots for cooking it and whirl sticks for beating the beverage into a creamy froth.

There was nothing to be taken from the *Cibola II* but the small compass. The wrecked aeroplane the boys gazed at for the last time, with real regret. But its purpose was accomplished and the delicate car and the once powerful engine were abandoned to a lasting tomb among the trees beneath which old Daniel Hortop slept. Ned tore off a strip of silk and made of it a bag for the magic image. Alan then slung the idol over his shoulder and the boys took a last look at the ruins themselves.

"They'll never believe our description of them," sighed Ned, "for the world has never believed the stories of the few explorers who have penetrated to these wonders."

"And we can't even photograph them," sorrowfully added Alan. "What wouldn't Bob give to be here!"

"Now that the excitement is all over and we know that we can get out," musingly added Ned, as they sat on an exquisitely carved column, "it wouldn't be a bad idea, perhaps, to wait a few days."

Alan sprang up in alarm.

"Wait a few days?" he almost shouted.

"We could make sketches of everything, and plans and diagrams——"

"Wake up!" exclaimed Alan. "Wake up! Not

for me. We're not going to wait another minute."

"We've hardly looked around," continued Ned, but half smiling as he said it, "and it's a chance that we'll probably never have again."

For answer Alan caught his dreaming chum by the shoulder and, without so much as another glance at the ruins, signaled to the waiting escort that they were ready. Ned's eager eyes were fixed on the sun-kissed tip of the towering pyramid.

"Come on!" insisted Alan stoutly. "This is no time for dreaming."

With another sigh Ned once more swept his eyes over the ruined, awesome glories of the past at his feet, and then, lifting his cap, almost reverently, he turned, and the party passed down the steps to the river bank below.

Three days later, their clothing in rags and their faces torn with the serrated edges of tropic vines and leaves, Ned and Alan, with their faithful guides, reached the slopes of the Sierra Madre Mountains. At noon on the fourth day they made camp in a high defile of the rugged range and rested until the next morning. On the sixth day the valley between the Sierra Madres and the coast range had been crossed and the expedition went into camp on the east side of the lower

coast range. The boys were glad to be once again above the tangle of tree and vine and out of the unwholesome exhalations of the hot and fetid jungle.

"I didn't know it was so far to any place in this world," groaned Alan that night as he lay, too exhausted to sleep, beneath the brilliant southern stars.

"How would you have liked to do it by compass?" asked Ned wearily.

No answer was needed. Alan only shook his head and sighed.

The trip through the unending forest had been a trial beyond the worst anticipations of the boys. In the woods themselves miles of the journey had been made by cutting paths through the dense growth with machetes. For other long stretches the route had been along devious, winding and narrow streams where the travelers had waded for hours in water or over rocks. When they left the streams the silent guides made for any slight rise in the ground where the vegetation thinned. As they approached each mountain range they chose the gullies and defiles for the advance, but it rained nearly every day and the mud in the gullies made progress tedious and exhausting. No trail was perceptible to the panting lads. They simply stumbled on, now and

then assisted by their escort, more often slipping in the sticky, muddy slopes and having to be rescued by the tireless guides all besmeared and rain soaked.

Additional strain was caused by the alternate night watches. Never, in the long tramp, did the two boys sleep at the same time. If fatigue came over the one on watch he awakened the sleeper for a relief spell.

"The worst I fear," explained Ned, "is that they may steal our talisman and leave us in the lurch. We'll take no chances."

Soon the forests, less dense, began to drop down toward the western lowlands, the ground before them rising and falling in gentle slopes. On the evening of the seventh day an Indian settlement came suddenly into sight on the banks of a winding stream. Instantly the priests and their followers made a wide detour. As they came over a slope the next morning the rolling ground dropped almost precipitately into a valley below. A white spot shone on the horizon. The emaciated, dirty, ragged boys leaned their weary forms against each other and drank in the welcome sight. They knew that it was a white-washed building. Then a slowly moving, low-lying cloud of deep black smoke drifting above the trees caught their eyes.

"It's a railroad," whispered Ned.

The long journey was at an end. Once more camp was made and tortillas and chocolate prepared. Then the attitude of the Indians making it plain that they thought they had earned their reward, the ceremony of the transfer of the idol was performed. Too tired to enact again the dramatic role, the boys, with dignity, unwrapped the precious figure and with low bows laid it in the trembling hands of the old priest. The effect was pathetic; to a man the natives threw themselves on the ground and wept for joy.

It was impossible to take farewell of the Indians in words, but Ned and Alan made them understand that they were grateful. The boys were about to set out toward the just discernible town when Ned paused and began to search his pockets. Alan understood and did the same. Between them they produced two pocket-knives, a small compass, two note books, the remnants of one handkerchief, two ten dollar gold pieces, three silver dollars and a one dollar bill.

As souvenirs the compass was presented to the old priest—his name had never become intelligible to the boys; the knives were given to the younger priests, and the five pieces of silver and gold were handed to the astounded but happy carriers. The

dollar bill was all that was left for the sixth Indian and the boys were in a quandary.

Then Alan laughed. "None of the money is of any use to them," he suggested, "except for the figures on it. Try the bill on him."

It was a silver certificate. As the eyes of the Indian fell on the picture of the outspread eagle and the portraits of Lincoln and Grant his face lit up with joy. So the boys left their savage friends, happy with their new treasures and kneeling again around the squat little idol.

In mid-afternoon, after several hours stumbling through the dark forest, the sun-blistered and skeleton-like adventurers heard a distant but unmistakable sound; it was the muffled, strident tone of a steam whistle. The boys plunged forward with renewed courage.

In the forest it was already growing dark when suddenly, the dense foliage parting, a cleared rancheria lay under the blistered feet of the wanderers, and, a mile or two beyond, there rose the white buildings and smokestacks of Hermosillo, Mexico—one of the long desired places of hotels, railways and the telegraph.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SALE OF THE TREASURE.

In the long days that had gone by while Ned and Alan had been drifting helplessly on the *Olivette*, their friends at McElmo Canyon had been busy. Bob Russell, Elmer Grissom and Salty Bill had reached the camp after six days' journey. The same rain storm that had delayed the ascent of the *Cibola* had flooded the course of the San Juan river, and the return expedition was held at the ford two days waiting for the water to fall. On the night of the big wind the treasure train camped on the banks of the water course. Elmer's knowledge of ballooning made him apprehensive concerning the *Cibola*, but Bob was positive that their friends were already out of the mountains and safely at the camp.

The trip through the Ute reservation was uneventful. At noon on October 17 the camp was sighted. Before the tired cavalcade could reach the canyon it was met by Senor Oje. When it was known that Ned and Alan had not been seen consternation fell on all. Six days had passed. In that time the airship boys should have made several trips.

"It was de big wind!" exclaimed Elmer at once. "I knowed dat it meant trouble."

All sorts of theories were advanced, but none of them was cheering. The boys, they knew, had food for only a few days, and if anything had happened to the balloon on the mesa they would surely have by this time reached the camp. Salty Bill was determined to start at once for the mesa. But the counsel of Senor Oje prevailed, and solemnly the party advanced to the camp. Major Honeywell was more than disturbed by the certainty that something had gone wrong. He had been anxious for several days, and now he went at once into consultation with Senor Oje and the new arrivals.

Elmer's theories were the ones that decided the course of action.

"I been a watchin' de wind like I was right wid de balloon," he explained, "an dar ain't been none to give no trouble exceptin' dat big wind. Ef dat caught 'em dey ain't nowhar round yere. Dey's furder dan de mesa now."

There was every chance that the boys had made an ascent and had been driven off their course; it was not unlikely, the older heads decided, that the *Cibola* had been forced to descend or had fallen on some mountain or desert wilderness. This theory left little reason for a rescue party

to return to the mesa, but Bob and Salty Bill would listen to nothing else.

"One of them might be sick," urged Bob. "Perhaps they haven't left the mesa."

At four o'clock that afternoon Salty Bill and Bob, on fresh horses and with two new pack animals and supplies, started on the back trail. Elmer, in spite of his desire to go, was not allowed to be a member of the party. Major Honeywell and Senor Oje had determined on another course of action. Only a few moments after Bob and Salty Bill set out, John Rico left on a forced ride to Cortez to reach a telephone. He carried a telegram to the Governor of Colorado, briefly outlining the situation and asking him to notify the Governors of Arizona and New Mexico to make official inquiry of towns concerning the possible sighting of the *Cibola*. Another message was directed to the division superintendent of the Santa Fe Railway at Albuquerque asking him to communicate with section bosses as far west as California.

No news of the disappearance was sent directly to the newspapers as was at first planned but, forty-eight hours later, when Major Honeywell and Senor Oje and Elmer had reached Dolores and found no word of the missing boys, the two men framed and dispatched sympathetic but reas-

suring telegrams to Mrs. Napier and Mr. Hope in Chicago. And these were just in time, for already word of the probable disaster had reached the newspapers. The telegrams to Ned's mother and Alan's father instilled hope in spite of the newspaper accounts.

Dan Mears maintained the camp at McElmo Canyon with ample supplies. Several days having passed without word of the missing boys or the balloon, Elmer again put forward his theory that the air craft, if caught in the terrific gale, might have been carried hundreds of miles to the southwest. Senor Oje then appealed to the War Department and the coast shipping masters. When Bob and Salty Bill returned, after eight days' absence, with no word of the missing lads, and no news of the balloon could be obtained from all the sources to which the anxious ones had gone, hope began to wane.

Three weeks after the day on which the expedition had divided at the mesa, Bob Russell and Elmer Grissom, helpless in the absence of any news of the missing boys, took the train for the East. With them journeyed Major Honeywell and Senor Oje. The two men were going to Chicago under a sense of duty they owed the parents of the two boys. Major Honeywell's interest in the remarkable relics brought to him by

the return caravan had been lost in his keen sorrow over the tragic close of the trip; he had only indifferently examined the priceless pottery which had been boxed and forwarded to Washington.

The metal treasure of silver and gold, the turquoise specimens and the great emerald, were in Senor Oje's charge. That gentleman, no less moved by the disaster than his associate Major Honeywell, had a double object in his trip.

"It's all I can do for their parents," he explained sorrowfully. "I am going to dispose of the treasure to the best advantage, not for ourselves, but for Mrs. Napier and Alan's father."

He had not explained his full plans to Bob, but he and Major Honeywell had at once decided that, after the expenses of the expedition were paid, the entire remaining proceeds, less Bob's share and an adequate compensation to the faithful Elmer, were to be divided between Mrs. Napier and Mr. Hope. Senor Oje and Major Honeywell did subsequently proceed to New York, where they made most advantageous sale of the valuables entrusted to them.

The silver metal in the pillar bands, the bowls and scrapers, the body of the Sacred Eagle and the miscellaneous rings, anklets and wristlets weighed 3,752 ounces and were found to be worth

\$2,143. The gold bands, bowls, scrapers, wings, head and talons of the eagle, and the breastplate and the figure of the sun from the temple door weighed 1,638 ounces. These were worth by weight \$32,760. But at Major Honeywell's suggestion these were not put on the market as old metal. This portion of the treasure was put in the celebrated ethnologist's charge. No one knew better than he the extraordinary value of the relics as specimens of a long extinct civilization. The collection was finally divided between two museums in America and one in Europe, for approximately \$80,000.

Nor were the unique bits of matchless turquoise disposed of immediately. The supply was more than the market demand. All concerned in the expedition took specimens of it as lasting souvenirs of the remarkable discovery. But \$28,000 worth of it was sold outright.

The sale of the great emerald was also delayed some months. Dealers in precious stones were skeptical for a time. Then the real history of the gem became known in other quarters and on a second visit to New York Senor Oje disposed of the ancient brilliant privately—whether for personal adornment or museum purposes is not yet known, but the check exchanged for it was signed by a name high in the financial world, and

it read \$65,000. The aggregate sum realized was \$173,903.

At one o'clock on the second of November the two men and Bob and Elmer, after long, hard grips of silent Salty Bill's gnarled hand, boarded the train at Dolores for Denver. "It's jes like buryin' em," exclaimed Elmer with tears in his eyes. His words voiced the feelings of the others. There was no joy felt in the magnificent scenery that day. Once, in the long afternoon, Major Honeywell said to the young reporter:

"Bob, I suppose you have your story at last—even if it is a tragedy."

Young Russell was silent some minutes. Then he answered in a low voice.

"I told Ned Napier I'd never write the story of his secret until he gave me leave. If he's dead it will never be written—by me."

The travelers spent the next night in Denver, preparatory to leaving for Chicago at half-past eight on the following morning. Bob, always restless and curious in a new city, was up early. At seven o'clock he returned from a walk and purchased a morning paper.

In five minutes a white-faced young man, with a paper clenched in his hand, was dashing up the wide marble stairs of the luxurious hotel three steps at a time. He had no time for elevators.

There was a crash at the door of the parlor suite occupied by Senor Oje and Major Honeywell.

"Major Honeywell! Major!" the young man called at the top of his voice. "Quick! Quick!"

In another moment the door flew open and Bob Russell staggered into the room.

"Found! Found!"

It was all he could say. But his shaking finger pointed to the great news he had just read. Under a two-column head—"The Airship Boys Found"—an Associated Press telegram from Hermosillo, Mexico, told the whole story briefly.

Although excited over the happy news Major Honeywell did not forget Elmer. Before the story had been fully read he summoned the colored boy to the apartment and the general rejoicing became almost hysterical. Bit by bit the meagre story was reviewed. The great perils through which the boys had successfully passed seemed to move the faithful Elmer less than the pathetic account of their appearance when they reached civilization.

When Senor Oje had read for the second time how the boys had entered the Mexican town, gaunt, ragged, shoeless and without even the means to send a telegram to their friends; how they had been arrested by the ignorant officious police and had only succeeded late in the evening

in securing permission to make themselves known to an American citizen, the Mexican crushed the paper in his hand. Dispatching Bob to the office for a railway guide the two men and Elmer hastily clothed themselves.

Elmer's first words as he returned, jubilant of face and excited, were:

"Cain't we telegraph them some money?"

"Or go to them?" added Bob eagerly.

"Too late for either," replied Senor Oje, as he hastily examined the time tables. "Our friends reached Hermosillo night before last. I know the town. It is full of good people. The boys will want for nothing—have no fear of that. Hermosillo is 175 miles from Nogales on the Mexican line." Senor Oje looked at his watch. It was fifteen minutes after seven o'clock. "A quarter of an hour ago," he added, "Ned and Alan reached Nogales. From that town they must go to Benson on the Southern Pacific Railway and they can't get a train until tomorrow morning."

Bob rushed away unbidden to get a telegraph form.

"Unquestionably," continued Senor Oje, "the boys will leave Benson at 8:23 tomorrow morning and hurry to Chicago. They will be in El Paso, Texas, at five o'clock tomorrow evening and will

reach Chicago on the Limited the following evening at half-past nine."

A few minutes later a long telegram was on its way to Nogales, Mexico. It was more like a letter than a telegram, and contained an individual message from each member of the party and an outline of their immediate plans. Late that afternoon a long reply was delivered to Senor Oje on the Burlington flyer speeding eastward. It read:

"To all thanks. Reasonably O. K. Senor Oje: Anticipated you; drew on your bank for \$500. Major Honeywell: Sorry lost idol and mummy. Found ruins beat Egypt. Bob: Write story when you like, got another. Elmer: Learned how to make real chocolate. Ned Napier and Alan Hope."

It is hardly necessary to describe what happened when two bronzed and strangely garbed boys alighted from the Limited two evenings later in the big Rock Island depot in Chicago. For ten minutes there was nothing but exclamation and explanation. Reporters surged about the returned castaways; snapshots were made, and at last, led by Senor Oje, Ned and Alan made their escape to a waiting touring car. As the driver headed the machine through the brilliantly lighted streets, with three or four reporters close

behind in taxicabs, the two boys sank back in their seats with sighs of relief. In a few more minutes they would be home again—Ned with his mother and Alan with his father and mother and Mary.

As the big car shot into the glare of State Street Senor Oje noticed the drawn, tired faces of the two lads.

"I suppose," he said sympathetically, "you boys have had enough of balloons and aeroplanes for some time to come?"

Alan sat up suddenly.

"Do you know how he spent his time on the train?" And he looked at Ned. "He says if he can afford it he's going to try a new idea he has about air navigation."

Ned laughed and tried to put his hand on his chum's mouth. But the latter broke away.

"And that he's going to discover the North Pole if some one else doesn't do it before next summer."

"Bully," exclaimed the irrepressible Bob Russell, "and you've got to let me write the story. It'll be great: 'The Airship Boys Due North; or, By Balloon to the Pole.'"

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